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Relationships between humans are comprised of many interwoven facets. So are relationships between humans and alcohol. This pilot research project attempts to conceptualize a few of the components that exist in the latter relationship and demonstrate an approach that may be used for additional investigation in the future. Ten male college students discussed their history with alcohol in an interview setting and, in doing so, described ways in which they developed relationships with the substance. Discussion of familial socialization focused on lessons centered on culture and/or moderation. Informants embedded discussion of the continued development of these relationships in discussion with components they considered to be important to their life stories.

Much of the language used to put words around these relationships was divided into vernaculars of intent and vernaculars of strategy. These groupings allow for a rich understanding of different motivations that rest behind alcohol-related decisions and ways people categorize and understand different types of drinking behavior. Structuring the data in this manner creates an understanding of different alcohol-related desires and a variety of drinking styles that people use to achieve these ends. As alcohol can impact a situation in unpredictable ways, attempts to match strategy with intent may fail. Some of these strategies, such as alcoholic drinking, are not portrayed in a favorable manner.

With this in mind, a struggle for control is embedded in the vernaculars of strategy. By doing this, informants projected agency and power on alcohol, thereby

making it a subject and creating a viable relationship partner. This battle was also evident in the narratives told by informants. Some told of the ability to maintain control over alcohol throughout the life span up to that point. Others reported periods where control was lost and described the personal and social process through which it was regained. At the time of the interview, each person stated that he was reliably in command of his interactions with alcohol.

INVESTIGATING RELATIONSHIPS WITH ALCOHOL:  
THE CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING THROUGH  
NARRATIVE IN INTERVIEW SITUATIONS

by

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Approved by

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Committee Chair

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For my mom and my dad.

## APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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## PREFACE

As the interviewer's role in meaning creation is considered as part of this research project, I would like to inform readers about my personal relationship with alcohol and how it led to the development of this research topic. Except for a few bouts of drinking with friends in high school and a couple of turns as a designated driver, I did not give alcohol much thought until the year after I graduated high school. That winter, the vehicle I was driving was struck by one with an intoxicated driver at the wheel. This person was quickly identified, but never arrested, as he was not in the country legally and chose to run away from the scene. In all honesty, I forgot this man's name and aliases moments after hearing them. He is but one actor in a lifelong string that participated in a series of decisions that eventually resulted in this collision. I wasn't just injured by him; I was injured by all of them.

The present study evolved from a desire to understand the social factors that led to this collision. I want to know how a person comes to know alcohol through social interaction, and how he or she learns to think and speak about it. This exploratory project is meant to begin developing a thick understanding of the choices individuals make concerning alcohol rather than just examining the immediate set of circumstances and decisions that precede a negative alcohol-related consequence.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

I've had a bottle of low-cost champagne in my refrigerator for little over two years now. It waits there, chilled, to be enjoyed after I successfully defend my thesis. Containers of wine, beer, and mustard have come and gone in this period, but this bottle holds its location. The champagne isn't just alcohol, but a reminder of the celebration to come.

For many people, the idea of a bottle of alcohol sitting cold and untouched for years would seem curious. We develop interpretations of alcohol use through interactions with family, friends, and even casual acquaintances. As time passes, we each construct and internalize an understanding of the substance and its uses. By the time we are in the third decade of life, each of us has come to know alcohol in a unique way. Inanimate though it is, we each form a relationship with alcohol.

As someone reaches for a glass of beer or shot of vodka, he or she may assign certain qualities and traits to the substance. The beer or vodka has no agency – no will of its own – it is, rather, something we give it, as in, “I need that drink or two after work; wine relaxes me,” or “One drink and I get giddy.” We might well accuse alcohol of evil intent, leading us astray; we might credit it for inspiring courage. There is seemingly no end to the number of connections we can make with alcohol. As I interact with the

champagne in my refrigerator, I am relating to it as a relationship partner who will celebrate my success with me.

The purpose of this pilot study is to examine how people understand and make sense of their relationship with alcohol. The idea is to treat the person and alcohol as a relationship, a bond of sorts. I sat down with five male college students in the first few years of their 20s and another five close to the end of this period. Our first task was to discuss exposure to alcohol and periods of its use throughout the life span. What resulted from each conversation is an account of a person's history with drink.

One of the regularly examined topics was context and the way it shaped a person's relationship to alcohol. Varying examples of this influence can be found throughout the drinking history, or drinking career, of each person. For instance, regular drinking during "happy hour" encourages people to think of alcohol as a marker that divides different parts of the day. Similarly, if a person has a history of drinking with jovial people, alcohol alone begins to acquire this quality. Most of the things we know about alcohol are learned through social interaction. By asking an individual to describe significant periods of his drinking career, we can see how a person fashions a connection with alcohol in an interview situation.

The technique known as active interviewing was used to help informants describe the evolution of their relationship to alcohol. Informants were asked to describe what they sought out of alcohol use at different times as well as what traits they have come to attribute with the substance. One line of inquiry asks people to describe their relationships to alcohol using anthropomorphic terms. By changing the field of thought

to one focused on personification, informants were encouraged to think about their interactions with alcohol in a different manner. Asking informants about the human qualities they assign to alcohol reveals much about the way they relate to the substance as an object or as a component of their own personalities.

Each of the discussions served to construct a narrative about the past that says a lot about the informant's present relationship with alcohol. Connections between the way people describe past and current approaches to drinking can be used to show how the individuals interviewed makes sense of their power and control in their relationships with alcohol and, conversely, alcohol's power and control over them at different points in time. This understanding makes up much of the way each informant thinks about and makes decisions involving alcohol use.

## CHAPTER II

### HOW SOCIOLOGY UNDERSTANDS ALCOHOL

Alcohol is among the most peculiar of liquids. It is intoxicating to the point of poisoning the body. But it is also legal, a source of considerable revenue, and is often involved in an iconic step in the passage from child to adult. Through inspection of old vessel fragments, Archaeologist Patrick E. McGovern (2009) has dated the earliest confirmed use of alcohol at approximately 7,000 BC, a Neolithic grog brewed in China. Although use cannot be confirmed, tools suspected to have been used in alcohol production have been found at a site in Upper Egypt that dates back to 16,000 BC (McGovern 2009).

As with many cultural items, the history of alcohol can be divided into two concurring histories (Holt 2006). One history focuses on production and the structures that either enable or hinder distribution. Prior to wide distribution networks, limitations created by climate and available arable land determined the types of alcohol consumed. Beer production and use dominated in those areas that permitted growth of cereal grains and hops, such as Northern Europe, while wine was more ubiquitous in those areas where grapes are commonly produced. As the required production methods of these two beverages necessitate varying amounts of labor, beer was typically brewed at home while wine was usually purchased. Distilled beverages were primarily used as medicine in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and a variety of forms did not appear in large quantity until the 17<sup>th</sup> century,

when recreational drinking of these beverage began taking hold (Holt 2006). Such spirits did not become popular until the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Braudel 1981).

The second history of alcohol is one of consumption. Whereas the first history could be described as a physical chronology, the second is more of a cultural narrative. Alcohol consumption has had a presence in public spaces for thousands of years. Indications of its use in celebrations can be traced back to Egypt in 2100 BC and Sumeria in 2500 BC. By 1000 BC, alcohol was being consumed in such a fashion all around the world (Gately 2008). There have been many different forms of drinking establishments throughout time. Archeological study of Pompeii, destroyed in 79 AD, reveals 118 small shops known as *tabernae* around town where lower class citizens consumed alcohol (Gately 2008). As the Roman Empire disintegrated and ideas of the Renaissance began to take hold, public drinking changed as well. Western European inns began to appear in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, serving not as lodging for travelers, but as a place where they could consume alcohol alongside locals (Reeves 1998). Along with inns, taverns and alehouses transformed into locations where people discussed politics, religion, and other aspects of identity (Kümin and Tlustý 2002).

These locations were also the primary source of prepared food before popularization of the modern restaurant in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Restaurants addressed both the culinary (Spang 2000) and status desires (Clark 1975) of clientele, both aspects neglected by most drinking establishments of the day. With the increasing prevalence of restaurants, alcohol varieties also obtained increasing cultural significance. The notion of



fine dining, both then and now, often includes the pairing of food with an alcoholic beverage determined to enhance the sensory experience.

Throughout history, most drinking establishments have been frequented by the middle and lower classes, while those in the upper classes often choose to imbibe at home or in private clubs (Holt 2006). A similar pattern existed in college drinking in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. College itself was a privilege generally reserved for the offspring of wealthy, an opportunity exclusively for males until the 1860s. Academic endeavors were less important to many students during this period than the pleasure and social contacts provided by the party scene (Sperber 2000). In elite schools such as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, privileged status was demonstrated by many through conspicuous consumption (Veblen 1899) of alcohol. College students around the country emulated the patterns of clubs, social organization, and interest in athletics established in these prestigious schools (Ernest 1953).

The two concurrent histories that developed over thousands of years replicate themselves in unique ways for each individual. While relatively few individuals are involved in the production of alcohol, each person who drinks experiences a progression of availability influenced by a number of environmental factors. As with the history of alcohol in general, patterns of individual accessibility influence where, when, with whom, and how alcohol is obtained and used. Of course, alcohol use exists in a complex social context. Numerous cultural and social concerns inform decisions involving drinking and the patterns that these choices produce. This makes ethanol more than just a molecule and alcohol more than just a beverage.

Alcohol is of great interest to many sociologists. Writing broadly, those in the discipline approach the topic with a focus on three theoretical categories: 1) the social conditions that influence alcohol use, 2) those conditions that describe why some do not drink, and 3) the language used by social groups and institutions that influence alcohol use (Faupel, Horowitz and Weaver 2004). These approaches are by no means mutually exclusive, readily intersecting and highly dependent on one another. For the purposes of this review, we will discuss each line of thought separately and then, in the next chapter, craft intersections that will be used in this research project.

### **Social Conditions That Influence Alcohol Use**

Social process theories understand the use of alcohol an act learned from others rather than as an inherent feature of the human existence (Faupel, Horowitz and Weaver 2004). Edwin Sutherland's (1947) theory of differential association focuses on criminal behavior, but lays forth the basic principles that have guided much research on alcohol use to date. To put it simply, this theory contends that behavior is largely learned through associating with people who place positive value on such actions. This theory states that as the frequency, duration, priority, and intensity of relationships grow, so does the influence of their values on individual behavior (Sutherland 1947).

Robert L. Burgess and Ronald L. Akers (1966) take this a step farther to say that social reinforcement is important for exposure to drugs such as alcohol, but that the substance itself often provides intrinsic reinforcement. If use is pleasurable, this positive reinforcement inspires continued use. In the careers of many drinkers, however, negative

reinforcement may also lead to continued use. This is due to a desire to avoid the negative effects that stem from not having the drug. These negative effects are often physical, but may be social in nature. The use of positive and negative methods of reinforcement at different points is called differential reinforcement (Burgess and Akers 1966). Howard Becker (1953) writes that many of the positive effects of marijuana are interpreted and experienced through a socially acquired lens. Users in this study learned the technique of use as well as the strategies a person needs to use and enjoy marijuana use apart from the group (Becker 1953). Even when use takes place away from other people, it has a distinctly social component.

In thinking about the ways alcohol is of interest to social scientists, people often think about the factors and conditions that lead to use. Individual branches in the social sciences tend to think about different things and how they relate to the substance. Psychologists often cite brain changes and desires lodged deep within the brain. Economists often rely on rational choice theory to understand when and why people do things. Sociologists primarily examine social influences on decisions.

Family, peer groups, close friends, and passing strangers are among the many influences that shape the varied bonds we develop with alcohol. Some people hold fast to a religious doctrine prohibiting all use of the substance, yet others are guided by their religion to use alcohol at certain times. While there are religions that endorse sporadic use of alcohol, often within ritual proceedings, there are no mainstream religions that encourage heavy drinking (Edwards 2000). Religious members of society, particularly those who are college students in the United States, have an increased tendency to embed

themselves in a social environment that sees alcohol use as immoral and as a precursor to sin (Ellison et al. 2008). This belief is established because, "...alcohol consumption at almost every level may tend to reduce inhibitions and undercut the influence of normative constraints on individual behavior" (Ellison et al. 2008:823).

Religious ideology is just one of many social influences that affect the way people develop personal doctrines of alcohol use. Membership in college fraternities and sororities has been found to correlate with higher rates of binge drinking due to organizational contexts that, "appear to tolerate hazardous use of alcohol and other irresponsible behaviors" (Robbins 2004:137). In a qualitative analysis of sorority life, Alexandra Robbins identifies varying degrees of peer pressure in sorority member alcohol use. Many of the ritual group functions and activities endorsed, often informally, by each chapter include a component devoted to alcohol use. Absence from such events, or even the adoption of a pattern of alcohol use different than the other members, can be difficult to maintain if one wishes to maintain meaningful integration into the group (Robbins 2004).

Many social groups view sporting events together. Over the course of time, these occasions often develop ritual aspects. Tailgating provides a fine example of patterned socialization around these contests (Drenten et al. 2009). This alcohol-infused camaraderie is especially true for games considered to be important, but is also the case for those considered to be easy wins or expected losses. Drinking and the other activities that accompany the game viewing experience often become as much of a draw as the sporting event itself.

Competitive contests often emerge among drinkers themselves, with games like beer pong and flip cup becoming popular activities (Vander Ven 2011). These, too, may begin to exhibit ritual qualities over time. The notion of a “drinking game” can be little more than watching a certain television program or movie and drinking each time a particular event or set of events occur. These group activities hold a lot of social value to many individuals.

### *The “Lay Theory of Successful Drinking”*

As part of the development of the understanding about alcohol, each person constructs a “lay theory of successful drinking” (Denzin 1987:83). This is the individual belief each person develops through experience, interaction, and observation about the behavior required to achieve a desired outcome involving alcohol use. This describes a method through which people decide what, when, where, and how much to drink. It serves to situate each decision about alcohol within the context of other situations and experiences.

Intoxication can be an important component of drinking judged to be successful. Henry Wechsler and Nancy Isaac (1992) indicate a growing proportion of students who see intoxication as a good reason to drink alcohol. One way to look at how the desired effects of drinking relate to decisions to stop drinking or change activities is through examination of drinking games. Thomas J. Johnson (2002) conducted an exploratory study designed to look at college student motivations for joining in drinking games as well as the reasons people give for ending their participation. Johnson identified

conformity, interpersonal competition, and excessive consumption as the top three motivators for both male and female participation. The main reasons members of each group stop playing are that other people are quitting and the individual in question thought that he/she has had enough to drink. The notable correlation between excessive consumption as a reason for playing as well as a reason for stopping indicates that many people do play intending to reach the point of intoxication (Johnson 2002).

Another reason frequently given for leaving or ending these drinking games is the experience of an unintended negative consequence. This may be one of many things, such as an argument, a fight, or an ordered dissolution of the gathering by an authority figure (Johnson 2002). Some people are able to categorize negative experiences as accidental or caused by other drinkers and continue considering an established course of action as successful (Denzin 1987). On the other hand, drinkers may be inspired to amend their notions of successful drinking following undesirable occasions. Many people have responded to an unpleasant alcohol-related event with an oath of sobriety or other self-imposed restrictions on drinking behavior. These pledges are carried out with varying degrees of success. As the negative effects subside, it becomes easier for a person to dispel consequences as unrelated, insignificant, or as an acceptable price to pay for the benefits involved in drinking behavior (Vander Ven 2011). The redefinition of negative consequences as acceptable byproducts eliminates motivation to anticipate and prevent these occasions through behavioral modification.

The meaning assigned to alcohol and the conditions involving its use vary among individuals, across differing social contexts, and across the life course. A socially driven

progression of understanding also takes place with the use of other drugs. As people learn how to perceive the effects of a drug and define them as positive, users learn how to negotiate risks associated with its use (Becker 1953). In the process, users acquire rationalizations and justifications that allow them to dismiss incongruous conceptions as those of outsiders (Becker 1963). As with the lay theory of successful drinking, the insider understandings created in this manner are highly personal and dynamic.

In addition to the practical strategies about how to maximize benefits and minimize drawbacks, drinkers learn other mental strategies that serve to create experiences considered optimal. Social life installs mental horizons that instruct people to pay attention to some objects in the sensory field while ignoring others. Such strategies limit mental processing and allow those consuming alcohol to focus on the positive when possible (Zerubavel 1997). The attention allocation model used by Steele and Josephs (1990) indicates that alcohol intoxication leaves people with the ability to process salient, immediate cues in the environment, such as the desire for fun, but less able to address “peripheral cues and embedded meanings” (Steele and Josephs 1990: 923). This leaves the drinker with an “impoverished version of reality in which the breadth, depth, and time line of our understanding is constrained” (Steele and Josephs 1990: 923). The authors call this alcohol-induced shortsightedness “alcohol myopia.”

Many of the strategies embraced are done so by a group drinking together rather than on the individual level. Dramaturgical cooperation of teams drinking together creates and reinforces meaning in a particular situation (Goffman 1959). The meanings associated with these experiences are carried from one situation to the next and serve to

inform future behavior. Especially in matters believed to be inconvenient or uncomfortable, some such cooperation is achieved without explicit discussion. Such a “conspiracy of silence” serves as both a method of denial and an attempt to maintain a socially desired meaning (Zerubavel 2006). Silence leaves each individual to assume what group norms are regarding certain behaviors.

Perceived “descriptive norms” of peer group drinking consistently show that people believe their peers drink more alcohol than they actually do. People also create “injunctive norms” through observation, defined the perception of peer approval. The degree to which these injunctive norms impact an individual’s drinking behavior depends on how close the relationship is. This is partially driven by the cognitive limitations imposed by alcohol intoxication, including the dependence on more proximal cues for behavior (Neighbors et al. 2008).

Situated behavior is not only impacted by present social groups, but absent groups as well. Georg Simmel (1972) places each individual in the center of different social circles. Each person contributes a part of their personality to each collective. As a result, those with differentiated personalities tend to be members of multiple groups. These groups develop norms and cultural patterns which govern the action of individuals (Parsons 1935). These actions coalesce into experiences, some of which may become “turning points” in the career of an individual that account for beliefs and practices at various points in time (Goffman 1963).

As a person identifies and de-identifies with a growing number of cultural patterns and norms over time, it leads to an accumulation in the number of turning points



each person experiences. Precise turning points may not come into focus until later. Some take place in an instant, while others gradually, yet steadily, occur. In cases of the latter, the turning point comes from reflection. It could be argued that such a progression is actually a series of turning points rather than a single one. In either case, each individual experiences a unique sedimentation of experience that is used to understand each situation encountered (Schutz 1970).

### **Conditions That Describe Why Some People Do Not Drink**

As social learning theories assume people are only inspired to drink as a result of social influence, social control theories begin with the assumption that people are naturally predisposed to alcohol use and only social interaction can prevent it (Faupel, Horowitz and Weaver 2004). Sociologists study this dynamic through the lens of social control. In the words of Mathieu Deflem (2007), “Social control is an analytical concept, not a specific theory, that can be conceptualized in at least two ways: as a broad concept related to social order; or in a narrow understanding related to crime and/or deviance” (p. 5).

### *The Deviance Model of Alcohol Use*

Alcohol being a unique beverage, the United States legal system has a comprehensive set of rules for when it is legal for its use. Most people can drink alcohol without breaking the law, but not all of us. We can use it in some places, but not at others. We can drink alcohol while doing most things, but not everything. Alcohol is

responsible for incalculable amounts of social good and social harm. Society is organized, in part, to minimize this harm. Sociologists often divide these methods of social control into two categories: formal and informal.

### *Formal Social Control*

In the years following World War II, the sense of individualism in the United States increased and people became increasingly aware of the danger individuals may pose to one another. As this happened, the nature of social control changed from one built around consensus to one of power and force. The number of social entities that dispersed these principals grew smaller. What was once the project of many established institutions such as religion, law, and education, became a task primarily seated in the hands of the government (Deflem 2007). This is primarily done through the criminal justice system, but is also achieved through government programs like that of welfare that serve to keep social unrest at bay (Piven and Cloward 1971). Both programs continue their influence to this day. Every state enforces laws that limit the production and distribution of alcohol, as well as the types of activities a person is permitted to engage in while drinking. Many types of government assistance require adherence to the law, thereby amplifying the social control effect. Even for those never arrested, alcohol cannot be purchased using funds provided by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. This money can, however, be used to purchase Twinkies and Mountain Dew (Food and Nutrition Service 2013).

For many people, the mere threat of punishment is enough of an incentive to act a certain way (Felson and Clarke 2010). For a historical example of formal social control as it relates to alcohol, let us examine the period of Prohibition in the United States that occurred from 1920 until 1933. The National Prohibition Act did not forbid possession or production of many types of alcohol, but primarily focused on stopping the commercial sale of alcohol. An insufficient ability to enforce Prohibition rendered the act only partially effective (Edwards 2000).

More than just limiting the availability of alcohol in public establishments, prohibition de-normalized alcohol consumption for many and made the process of obtaining alcohol a deviant and, to varying degrees, a more involved activity. Adjustments made by those who continued to drink included a change in types of alcohol consumed, the locations in which it was done, and the frequency of use (Edwards 2000).

For an example of prohibition in the modern day, we need to look no further than prisons. Prisoners determined to acquire alcohol may do so through bribery, smuggling, or even self-production (Spradley 1970; Whitehead 2009). The transformation of leftover food into “pruno”, or “prison wine,” only requires a plastic bag, hot running water, and a cloth to both insulate the fermenting concoction and help conceal the procedure. In his poem, “A Recipe for Prison Pruno,” Jarvis Jay Masters (1997) paints a picture of pruno production as a grasp for freedom in a prison environment. More than just the risk of punishment, drinking pruno brings with it an increased risk of botulism poisoning (Vugia et al. 2009). A number of inmate deaths have been attributed to pruno and other prison-brewed potables in recent years (Aleccia 2011). The rarity of alcohol,

the efforts engaged in to procure it, and the risk all impact consumption patterns of each incarcerated individual.

Following the Islamic revolution in 1979, Iran banned alcohol use for all of its residents (Pourparsa and Ahmadi 2012). Many other countries with an Islamic majority enacted similar laws forbidding the purchase of alcohol. This includes Afghanistan (MacKenzie 2009), Kuwait, Brunei, Libya, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan (State 2012). In these instances, what would normally be considered informal social control practiced by religious institutions is taken up by the government and serves as formal social control.

All geographic areas in the United States place tight restrictions on the sale and distribution of alcohol. Eighteen states in the U.S. function as alcoholic beverage control states, those that operate a statewide monopoly on the sale of some, if not all, categories of alcoholic beverages (National Alcohol Beverage Control Association 2012). Among these laws are some that prohibit the sale of alcohol at certain times during the day and week. Similar to the laws in several Islamic nations discussed above, many were put on the books due to the influence of religion. Laws that enforce religions principals are casually known as “blue laws.” While these blue laws adopted in the United States are not all related to alcohol, the vast majority of those that remain are (Laband and Heinbuch 1987). While laws designed on religious tenets are upheld with less frequency, public health officials and moral entrepreneurs have mounted successful campaigns to keep these on the books (Becker 1963). A 1983 study in Sweden found that periods where alcohol is not sold significantly reduces the number of alcohol-related incidents attended to by police (Olsson and Wikstrom 1982). In the United States, however, blue

laws have been found to have a minimal effect on fatal car accidents between 1990 and 2009 (Lovenheim and Steefel 2011).

Much as they did during the United States Prohibition era, the vast majority of crimes concerning alcohol use go undetected by the criminal justice system. An even smaller number of those arrested actually reach the sentencing phase. In *The Culture of Public Problems: Drinking-Driving and the Symbolic Order*, Joseph Gusfield (1981) creates a flowchart displaying all of the steps a person must go through to be officially classified as an offender. At each stage, an agent of the criminal justice system is faced with a subjective decision to make. Do I pull this person over? Do I arrest this person? What do I charge him/her with? How much should I set bail? Do I offer a plea bargain? Do I find this person guilty? In keeping with the representation of the criminal justice system as a funnel, more and more people get kicked out at each of these stages (Black 1976).

Even though the low rates of convictions are well-known, formal social control continues to make an impact on some alcohol-related crime, albeit a limited one. In the November 28, 2006 edition of *The Carolinian*, the student newspaper of The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, a guest columnist wrote a lengthy piece describing the costs she incurred following two separate arrests for driving while drunk. She almost exclusively mentions the financial cost and pays little attention to the social cost or the potential loss of life. Two sentences within this half-page of text discuss the possibility to someone getting hurt. Furthermore, the columnist states that police arrest people for drunken driving because they have a quota to fill. This perspective frames people

arrested for this act as being the victims of oppressive law enforcement policy. The author of this article makes it very clear that the only reason she regrets breaking the law is the amount of money she had to pay for legal expenses and court fees. Before we consider fees an effective deterrent, it is important to note that the author mentions having very little income, but continued driving while intoxicated after her first arrest (Galgoci 2006). The threat of punishment without certainty it will be carried out is not necessarily an effective form of deterrence.

### *Informal Social Control*

Informal social control is the name given to “attempts to induce conformity through people’s routine supervision of each other’s behavior, reinforced by rule making, admonition, and censure” (Felson and Clarke 2010:106). While the instrumental function of the law was described above, it also has a symbolic function that serves in an informal capacity (Gusfield 1963). The government, albeit an institution that champions the morality of only a segment of the population, is the only entity that can claim that it represents an entire society. It is seen as the purveyor of public norms. This endorsement is spread through the words and actions of other groups integrated in the society at large (Gusfield 1967). It forms the backbone of Travis Hirschi’s Social Bond Theory, which claims that a bond to conventional society through attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief, is what convinces many to forgo selfish acts of deviance in favor of more socially acceptable actions (Hirschi 1969).

People who subscribe to messages about morality from mainstream society internalize these social control efforts and become regulators of their own behavior. Michel Foucault (1977) writes about the spread of discipline as a form of punishment in the last half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Discipline establishes “proper” conduct and then requires that each person examine and normalize his or her behavior to meet the standard that results from social interaction (Foucault 1977).

The peer associations people form have an important role in the development of this standard through social learning that takes place within the group. Just as peer networks lead to alcohol use in many situations, they also lead to periods when alcohol is not used. These groups teach us what periods of the week it is acceptable to drink alcohol, as well as the location it is okay to drink in and the amount that is appropriate. A lot of our social environment depends on the weekly cycle. Recognizing the day of the week is one of the first things people do upon waking and influences many decisions made throughout the day (Zerubavel 1985). Many college students schedule their drinking on a weekly schedule, with exceptions built around special events like exams (Vander Ven 2011).

The way people treat the acceptance of alcohol also depends on the annual calendar. Only on Thanksgiving would many people consider it okay to share a bottle of wine with your family at 3pm. Such behavior the next day, or even the next Thursday, would surely elicit a completely different response. Returning to a university setting after an extended break, on the other hand, often leads to even more drinking than usual

(Vander Ven 2011). In a manner similar to how we learn when to drink, we learn when to not drink.

### **Language Used by Social Groups and Institutions That Influences Alcohol Use**

Symbolic interactionism consists of three core premises: 1) people act towards things in accordance with the meanings they assign to them, 2) these meanings are developed and assigned through social interaction with other people, and 3) meanings are then experienced and adjusted through interaction and interpretation (Blumer 1969). To put it another way, meaning is not inherent, but a social product. The labels assigned to people, ideas, and activities all impact both the use of alcohol and the way people understand it. As mentioned above, religion and various governmental agencies use language that influences thoughts and decisions related to alcohol.

Another group that uses language to influence drinking behavior is Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Norman Denzin (1987) describes AA as a “new social world” (p. 243) that uses a language new to the drinker and unique to this supportive environment. This common interpretive structure helps the individual transform from a “suffering alcoholic” to a “recovering alcoholic” and creates a “universal singularity” that creates a shared understanding among members. Emphasis is taken off of the individual’s recovery and placed on the recovery of the entire group. In the process, each person learns to view experiences from the perspective of other people rather than from the self. As this is done through ritual performances, a reality develops that is both collective and individual (Denzin 1987).



College drinkers also use language to develop a collective understanding of alcohol and its use. Common terms used by these students to describe this state include “wasted,” “hammered,” “trashed,” and “plastered” (Vander Ven 2011). These words serve to perpetuate an image of resistance, both in the minds of the drinkers present and those who belong to different social groups. This label only emphasizes efforts by school administrators and public health officials to stem instances of binge drinking. As this language strengthens the rift between these two groups, it may lead to more oppositional behavior.

The term “binge drinking” is frequently used by public health officials and college administrators to describe certain types of alcohol use as harmful. The definition of the term itself is not consistent across time or gender (Faupel, Horowitz and Weaver 2004). In 2004, the National Advisory Council of the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism approved the current definition of binge drinking:

A “binge” is a pattern of drinking alcohol that brings blood alcohol concentration (BAC) to 0.08 gram percent or above. For the typical adult, this pattern corresponds to consuming 5 or more drinks (male), or 4 or more drinks (female), in about 2 hours. Binge drinking is clearly dangerous for the drinker and for society. (NIAAA 2004:3)

In this same publication, the NIAAA defines “risky drinking” as that which results in a blood alcohol between 0.05 and 0.08 and a “bender” as two or more days of “sustained heavy drinking” (NIAAA 2004:3). Prior to 2004, binge drinking was defined solely as the number of drinks (still 5 for males & 4 for females) consumed over an abstract “drinking session.” There was no mention of what constitutes a session and the fact that

people process alcohol at different rates (Faupe, Horowitz and Weaver 2004). The use of blood alcohol concentration as the defining characteristic of the term also doesn't necessarily mean the same to all people.

In addition to the language being used to describe certain types of alcohol use, the public health agencies that spread these messages of concern also play a part in shaping the social conceptions of use. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention regularly releases reports on the dangers of binge drinking. In a 2013 report on female binge drinking, the group reports an increased likelihood of injuries, violence, chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, cancer, reproductive health, alcohol dependence, and learning/memory problems (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2013). This organization, and many others like it, makes a concerted effort to connect a grammar of risk and danger to the potential consequences of alcohol use.

A similar argument has been used regarding laws concerning driving under the influence of alcohol. The use of a quantitative determination decided by committee "attaches to any given possibility a degree of certainty to which it normally has no right" (Fuller 1967:42). For conviction, the state does not have to prove that a driver is impaired, but just that the BAC is over the legislatively determined level. It assumes that BACs of .079 and .081 are markedly different in that one is dangerous while the other is not. The use of such a distinction in jurisprudence is referred to as a "legal fiction" (Lanza-Kaduce and Bishop 1986). It is not easy for an individual to learn his or her BAC at any given point. What results is a legal fiction that is loosely connected to both the

substantive act of drunk driving as well as a person's determination of sobriety.

Nevertheless, particularly in its relation to formal social control, the BAC matters.

Moving from the theme of labeling behavior to labeling people is also an important part of symbolic interactionism. Affixing a label to a person rather than an act brings with it a new social identity. As is the case in many instances of labeling, this new identity affects meaning creation differently in unique social groups. If a person has a reputation as a "party animal," he or she may face social expectations in drinking environments to act in this manner. This may not necessarily be understood in negative terms. If a family member hears this same information, though, an account (Scott and Lyman 1968) may be produced in order to minimize the stigma created by this new identity (Vander Ven 2011). When these labels are interpreted negatively, it makes it more difficult for a person to proceed with the attached behavior. This often inspires people to either learn to embrace the label or engage in actions in hopes of adding another label that reduces or transfers the stigma into one seen as more manageable (Becker 1963).

## CHAPTER III

### TALKING ABOUT ALCOHOL

#### **Expectations & Common Sense**

When people begin to associate one event with one that often follows, the first is said to evoke an expectancy. A number of psychologists have done research on the ways people develop these unconscious associations (Kirsch 1999). One of the primary ways these pathways are forged is through instances of experiential and social learning described in the previous chapter. A series of placebo studies done to test the impact of alcohol expectancies in the absence of alcohol itself indicates that the effects of these expectancies alone are weak. Most of the effects found came from individuals trying to compensate for the anticipated effects (Testa et al. 2006). In combination with the use of actual alcohol, however, these expectations can be powerful (Goldman, Darkes and Boca 1999).

The social learning process is continuous and organized through each individual's experience. At any and every moment, each person exists at the intersection of biography, history, and social structure (Mills 1959). We all organize the sedimentation of previous experiences in a stock of knowledge, a status and role, and a set of moral and ideological positions. These coalesce in an awareness of practical or theoretical activities that we may choose to engage in, or a "purpose at hand." "It is this purpose at hand which defines those elements among all the others contained in a situation which are

relevant for this purpose” (Schutz 1970:73). As people engage in drinking occasions throughout their lives, they form and continually reform a purpose at hand that corresponds with this sedimentation of experience. This is, in essence, how people develop and learn to believe in if-then statements, those associations that form the expectancies mentioned above. The meanings assigned to alcohol and the conditions involving its use vary across individuals and situations. As the situation changes, so do the expectancies. This awareness lies at the heart of the “lay theory of successful drinking” that guides decisions each of us makes about alcohol (Denzin 1987).

Clifford Geertz (1983), in his essay, “Common Sense as a Cultural System,” describes common sense as a highly personal function developed through repetitive interaction with culturally equivalent others. These exchanges lead to the development of expectations that, combined with factors specific to environmental characteristics and cues, comprise common sense (Geertz 1983). The ability to identify cues and process information for the extraction of meaning is hampered by alcohol intoxication. As a result, drinkers often attend to and encode fewer available cues, both external and internal. This interferes with the ability to relate cues and information to existing knowledge (Steele and Josephs 1990). Increased attention to situational cues is one of the compensatory effects found in alcohol placebo studies (Testa et al. 2006). This limitation hampers the influence of sedimentation on behavior and increases that of the current social group, as it requires less cognitive processing.

To put it another way, common sense is considered intrinsic to reality as a form of mundane reason. While notions of common sense are constructed individually,

development is influenced by legitimized authority, discussion with others, and the perception of activities by those considered similar (Geertz 1983). There are frequent disjunctures between these perceptions and reality (Steele and Josephs 1990). As is the case with mundane reason, denial of these social influences and belief in the attachment of common sense to an objective world is a key part of this pattern of thought (Pollner 1987). Geertz (1983) identifies common sense as a system because, despite differences in content, people regard the knowledge considered to be common sense in the same way. Common sense are those aspects of life considered intrinsic, practical, part of the most basic level of reality, embedded in the experiences of daily life, and accepted by everyone believed to have mental wherewithal. These aspects are heavily influenced by characteristics of the culture the actor's identity is grounded in and adaptations made to accommodate life in the immediate environment.

The categorization of elements entails identification of elements relevant to the "purpose at hand" and establishment of a stock of knowledge that classifies situations and responses as being either normal or strange. These classifications, or "domains of relevance," lead to the typification of objects. Typification, as a mental act, brings expected characteristics to events or occurrences seen as similar. These typifications sediment through time and are used to aid in even the most basic of problem solving. Language is an organizing method for typifications, meaning that thoughts are both allowed and constrained by them (Schutz 1970).

In this study, attention will be paid to the way behavior concerning alcohol is discussed. Those who believe alcohol use to be an important and expected part of the

college experience are more likely to make decisions in college about alcohol use accordingly (Crawford and Novak 2011).

### **Question Situations**

C. Wright Mills (1940) calls those occasions when detected behavior strays from the normative expectation of others “question situations.” Once a question situation arises, the questioned is left with the task of providing a vocabulary of motive the questioner finds acceptable, one that realigns past behavior with the understood normative expectations of this other person or group. As different assemblages of people have different normative expectations and different scenarios employ different vocabularies of motive, the development of a second distinct motive is often required (Mills 1940).

Such question situations may be seen as the creation of “reality disjunctures”, as it involves the questioning of a subjective world believed by each party to be objective and commonsensical. People use personalized forms of mundane reason to place themselves in an objective world with characteristics and events that are discoverable (Pollner 1987). Vocabularies of motive are used to solve such mundane puzzles to the self and others, as all people are invested in self-preservation of mundane reason (Pollner 1987). As mentioned in the previous chapter, people in these situations work together as a team to maintain this meaning (Goffman 1959). When errors in judgment are identified, the lay theory of successful drinking allows the drinker to deny negative consequences to himself or herself and attribute them to other factors (Denzin 1987).

The externalization of responsibility plays into the type of accounts people may use when faced with a question situation (Mills 1940; Scott and Lyman 1968). People often respond to such challenges with either excuses, explanations that acknowledge the behavior in question as pejorative while denying responsibility, or justifications, the admission of responsibility while challenging the negative quality assigned to the behavior (Scott and Lyman 1968).

When faced with a question situation, many people disavow responsibility for their actions by crediting behavior to alcohol and omitting the role of the individual. They distance the behavior of the self from that of the self plus alcohol. This approach is akin to the idea of actor-network theory in that alcohol can initiate an action-reaction chain and then, with the individual, create a third distinct actant (Law 1992). Claims that the alcohol “made” someone behave a certain way or caused them to overlook certain aspects abound in tales of alcohol use. The ease with which drinkers can use such externalization of responsibility with any combination of four modal forms of excuse (Scott and Lyman 1968) provides drinkers with an easy way to resolve reality disjunctures created by the need to explain behavior in one context to those in another. Such mundane puzzles are solved by the construction of a story that allows each party to hold on to individual views of an objective world with an underlying common sense (Pollner 1987). Many college students are ready and willing to accept thinly veiled explanations in anticipation that they will have to make a similar request in the future (Vander Ven 2011). Some plan to engage in behavior they know others will find questionable with the belief that alcohol use will satisfactorily explain their intended



actions to others. For instance, many students who go out in search of casual sex are more likely to behave in manners that they know they can account for at a later time by assigning blame to alcohol (Vander Ven and Beck 2009). In conversations with convicted rapists, Diana Scully and Joseph Marolla (1984) found that 77 percent of those who admit to having committed rape (often understating the amount of force used) and 84 percent of those who deny this behavior mention alcohol in an attempt to verbally neutralize the negativity of the act.

Social identities differ in different group membership, as people may bring one of many different aspects of the self to each collection (Simmel 1972). Vocabularies of motives are often used to bridge the gap between what one person believes to be reasonable to other members of different groups. A failed attempt to bridge this gap between actual and virtual social identity in a group leads to the development of stigma (Goffman 1963) that brings with it many unpleasant ramifications, giving the individual more motivation to solve mundane puzzles. Vocabularies of motive serve to relay accounts in such a way that hides the gap between group member expectation and actual individual behavior.

## **Projection**

Just as alcohol can be conceived as a scapegoat, it can also be seen as an elixir. It is often credited with helping people overcome shyness or timidity in conversations with potential sexual partners. It is also turned to in times of distress as a form of escapism (Vander Ven 2011). Sedimentation of these varying uses of alcohol and the often

conflicting cultural messages that belie them results in a dynamic form of individual externalization.

A number of scholars believe that interaction is an act of meaning making, and one not necessarily limited to those consisting of two humans. Others purport that a human can “project mind” (Cerulo 2009:536) onto nonhuman objects they interact with. In interactions with alcohol, a person may invest alcohol with agency, while he or she is in fact speaking *for* alcohol. Much of human contact with pets is actually interaction with meanings assigned to pet behavior (Sanders 1993). It is easy (and perhaps desirable) to interpret a cat’s desire for head scratching as affection and call her behavior “sweet” when it is simply self-serving on the cat’s part. This process of projection involves the human first assuming the role of the nonhuman (Cohen 1989) and then forgetting that the understanding of the nonhuman was created by the human (Owens 2007).

Projections of alcohol are prevalent throughout popular culture. In her bestselling memoir, *Drinking: A Love Story*, Caroline Knapp (1996) writes about alcohol as if it is an object of unrequited love. In her own memoir, Sacha Z. Scoblic (2011) describes her drinking as, “an ill-behaved child I carried around everywhere” (p. 15).

Anthropomorphized brand names allow for a variety of artistic representations of alcohol, particularly in music. Eric Church sings about how Jack Daniels, “kicked my ass again last night” and looks forward to his next encounter (Church, Hyde and Hutton 2011). Miranda Lambert (2001) calls Jack Daniels, “the best kind of lover that there is.” Hank Williams Jr. (1978) expresses his love for Jim Beam, although the drink is just a “homie” for A.L.T. and the Lost Civilization (1992). Other artists describe more tepid

relationships, with David Allen Coe (1978) demonstrating his friendship with Jack Daniels, Shelly West with Jose Cuervo (Jordan 1982), and Marius Müller Westernhagen (1978) with Johnny Walker. In writing about these different varieties of alcohol, each of these artists reveals a meaning more than utilitarian, the lyrics declare both love and friendship built through shared drinking behavior. As people are repeatedly exposed to these messages, this idea of alcohol as a separate entity with its own projected characteristics is one that begins to make sense to many people.

Many factors outside of the individual influence the relationship each person creates with alcohol and the self-imposed boundaries erected to limit the unexpected and the undesirable. Interpretations of alcohol's desirable effects and the behavior believed to produce it are products of the various combinations of previous drinking experiences, personal observations, and tales of experiences received from other people and the media. Social influences are involved in every step of the decision making process, from the notion that there is more than one option to choose from right through to the recollection of these decisions at a later time. All of these considerations, both *from* society and *for* society, impact the ways people understand their relationships with alcohol and interact with it accordingly.

### **Alcohol, Groups, and Identity Exploration**

Jeffrey Jensen Arnett (2000) writes about "emerging adulthood" as a developmental period that spans from the late teens until the mid-twenties. Each person makes the transition through this period at a different speed, but scholars generally

consider the age range of those in the emerging adult phase of life to be from 18 to 25. Throughout the course of this phase, emerging adults work to become self-sufficient in three areas of life: love, work, and worldviews. The individual and social exploration of these areas involves the exploration of and experimentation with identity and role components. Many in this period seek a range of experiences that serve to inform individuals about adulthood and prepare them for the experience. Marriage or parenthood frequently, but not necessarily, accompanies a reduction in experimentation and establishment of a self-sufficient and stable path (Arnett 2000). Parenthood also frequently slows or stops identity exploration, as people work to meet social expectations that begin during prenatal care (Ogle, Tyner and Schofield-Tomschin 2011). The emerging adult phase of life is considered to be more present in cultures and historical periods that allow an extended period of role experimentation. Even within societies that afford many this opportunity, there are large segments of the population that are led directly into young adulthood by social and/or economic pressures (Arnett 2000).

The importance of human relationships with nonhumans in identity exploration has been studied previously. Sociologist Amy L. Best (2005) explores automobile use in San Jose, California as a way for young drivers to define themselves. The restrictions placed on these relationships by increasing levels of observation and regulation was found to make identity exploration difficult for these teenagers. In the words of a former parking lot attendant, “People are wed to their cars and it’s part of the American identity. It’s to have your car and the car will set you free” (Eckman 2010).

People also develop and maintain meaningful relationships with gardens that serves to create personal identity. Many people consider gardens as sanctuaries from the pressures encountered in daily life (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2010). Older people often consider gardens as spheres where they can manage a plot of physical space as their control in other areas of life is diminishing (Bhatti 2006). Some primarily see gardens as a source of food in times as crisis, while others see the cultivation of organic food as a way to improve the social and environmental world (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2010). Much as with alcohol, each person experiences the garden and its relation to the self in a different way.

The present study is interested in the way people talk about relationships with alcohol as it relates to one's identity exploration. The emerging adult period frequently includes peak levels of alcohol use and abuse across the lifespan of many individuals (White and Jackson 2004/2005). Research has shown that alcohol intake increases after graduating high school, even those who forego college (White, Labouvie and Papadaratsakis 2005), and declines as people enter young adulthood (Bachman et al. 1997). Particularly for college students, alcohol use of various styles is allowed or even encouraged (Arnett 2005). More than just a shared activity, drinking often leads to an amplified expression of emotions and creates an atmosphere where appreciation and affection serve to help people feel like valued members of the college community. Such within-group support instills a strong bond to the group and increases the chance of similar interaction seeking (Vander Ven 2011).

Involved in the practice of drinking, many emerging adults develop and reinforce identity features through practices that serve to minimize alcohol-related troubles. Assistance given to fellow students who have taken ill following alcohol consumption often involves a type of mother-child role playing that reinforces nurturing components of one's identity. Assistance provided with the intent of apprehension avoidance and punishment minimization serves to similarly bolster identities of caring and reliability. The group bond of loyalty is also demonstrated in alcohol-infused environments as drinkers support friends engaged in altercations with others. This may come in the form of verbal support or physical assistance such as intimidation or fighting (Vander Ven 2011).

Identification with groups lays the groundwork for patterned socialization. People may schedule these ritual encounters based on schedules of responsibility, the availability of others, or any number of reasons. A location, set of activities, and drinking style may also accompany a regular time. Once these patterns have been developed, people may drink just because it is a certain time of the week (Vander Ven 2011) and have a somewhat reliable idea about what to expect. Members of some drinking groups develop "scripts" of behavior through interaction that come to create different identities for group members (Anderson 1978).

In addition to providing the opportunity for socialization and allowing people to associate themselves with desirable traits, performance in alcohol-infused contexts serves to experiment with other, more hedonistic, components of identity. A "party animal" reputation, or maybe just that of a fun person, is a lure to many who seek social

companionship (Vander Ven 2011). These identities typically associated with youth provide people with experiences that they can later share with other people. Just as people use vocabularies of motive to explain questioned behavior (Mills 1940), this also provides a desired set of stories that can be tailored and shared at a later point. The retelling of these tales can be a treasured component of social life in adulthood (Gans 1962). Such exploration of youthful identities is a crucial component for many emerging adults. Schulenberg, Maggs, and O'Malley (2003) explore an alternative link between a person's identity search and increased alcohol use. The researchers suggest that the failure to master developmental tasks results in frustration and stress which leads to a desire for release and relaxation that many find when drinking alcohol.

Each emerging adult stands has a unique perspective informed by a number of issues. Some of these include separation from family and old friends and the reduction of support this distance brings, the development of new friendships, experience with new roles, an increased number of opportunities, more demands, a new level of independence, and less parental monitoring (Maggs 1997; Schulenberg and Maggs 2002). The unique combination of these variables faced by an individual and the emotional impact is difficult to capture through quantitative measures.

There are a number of things that college students consider when making decisions about alcohol consumption. As mentioned in the previous chapter, many believe drinking to be an important and expected part of the college experience. Such a belief leads to increased alcohol use in individuals, an effect that has been shown to be dampened by involvement in and identification with institutional roles. Those people

who define themselves in terms of “spontaneous emotions and other impulsive experiences,” (Crawford and Novak 2011:477) are more likely to behave in a way compliant with their beliefs about alcohol and the college experience (BACE). When members of this group, the “impulsives,” drink, decisions are seen as related to subjective experiences. “Institutionals,” on the other hand, are more likely to make decisions based on a desire to meet obligations perceived of those in student roles (Crawford and Novak 2011). Such information shows that it is not just what emerging adults identify with, but the way they identify themselves, the “locus of self,” that impacts the use of alcohol in college.

The above ideas suggest multiple links between identity and alcohol use. Identity exploration is considered to be a fundamental feature of emerging adulthood and many in this phase of the life cycle find alcohol to be a useful tool in the process. Some people believe drinking to be an important component of their student role; another subset believes that alcohol allows them to behave in a manner more representative of their true selves (Vander Ven 2011). Personal identity is also strongly associated with conviviality and group membership, both of which may revolve around rituals and other practices involving alcohol. The relaxing of social expectations and the ease of externalization in question situations inspire many to do whatever feels good and face any problems, should they arise, later. Just as each person develops a unique definition of successful drinking, drinkers develop unique conceptions of alcohol itself.



## **A Competitive Understanding**

Related to both role consideration and routinized behavior, many students have drinking patterns that vary throughout the year. Student drinking increases at the beginning and end of terms and breaks. Successes, birthdays, and other celebrations often involve the consumption of alcohol (Vander Ven 2011). The presence of alcohol in these celebratory times becomes a key feature in the relationship many people develop with the substance. It is also turned to in times of sorrow, shame, and embarrassment. An elixir used by those with many different intentions, people turn to alcohol when they seek different things. Because people establish different associations, different notions of common sense involving the substance are developed.

The relationship each person develops with alcohol sediments throughout the life course, as each person develops a unique typification of the substance and what it brings. Relationships themselves are typifications (Schutz 1970). Past experiences, cultural messages, family influences, conversations with peers, and observations of others accumulate as part of this process that constructs a unique bond to the substance.

For further insight, let's turn our attention to the mental link many people create between alcohol and competition. This connection is not a construction of the modern day. Priests in Olympia offered libations to Zeus, the king of the Greek gods, on each day of Ancient Olympics; the games were believed to be founded by Zeus and were continued in his honor. Athletes who took their training seriously were to abstain from drinking (Swaddling 2002). As the competitions were going on, spectators were not permitted to partake in alcohol consumption (Miller 2004). Once the events for the day

ended, however, wine flowed at evening celebrations (Swaddling 2002). The games were seen as reverent expressions of honor and pride. Alcohol and the desires that were typically seen as inappropriate were approved of in times of celebration. As this contradiction was considered to be common sense, it remained easy to consider hedonism and religion as completely separate things. Alcohol was imbibed in the former and sacrificed in the latter. The separation and specialization of gods further entrenched this distinction. Acts typically considered to be debauchery were seen as acceptable for festivals celebrating Dionysus, the Greek god of grape harvesting, winemaking, and wine (Otto 1965). The definitions of alcohol as desirable in only a special set of circumstances was seen as an objective quality of the substance and impacted the relationship each person developed and maintained with the substance.

There remain rules and cultural standards by which people subjectively create conceptions they consider to represent the objective world. Athletes in college today are more likely to drink than non-athletes (Wechsler et al. 2002) and collegiate sports fans are more likely to drink than those classified as non-fans. They are also more likely to report intoxication as an important reason to drink (Nelson and Wechsler 2003). Many colleges and universities prohibit possession of alcohol on campus grounds, an edict that includes sporting stadiums and arenas. In 2005, 54 of the 119 Division I-A football schools allowed the sale of alcohol at playing venues. Not only do these schools make income from alcohol sales, but many also receive money for advertising alcohol. In fact, ten more schools (64) included advertisements for alcohol in sporting venues and programs than allowed sale (Wieberg 2005). Additional universities considered

permitting alcohol sales during sporting events in the wake of a drastic reduction in funds available to schools in 2011 (Hertzel 2011). On the other hand, many people feel that involvement in the sale of alcohol contradicts other statements from schools that encourage safe alcohol use (Wieberg 2005). This is but one of the numerous “mixed messages” that each person sorts through when creating their own conception of successful drinking and the vocabularies of motive that support it. Every relationship requires cue focusing and a selective memory. Ones involving alcohol are no different.

Group membership and observation is one of the ways people sort through conflicting ideas and expectations. The viewing of sporting events is something that many social groups do together and, over the course of time, such occasions may develop ritual aspects. Tailgating provides a fine example of patterned socialization (Drenten et al. 2009). This alcohol-infused camaraderie is true for games considered to be important, but is also the case for those considered to be easy wins or expected losses.

The ritual connection between sports and drinking alcohol replicates itself in both drinking practices and the terminology used to describe them. Many students participate in “pre-gaming,” a term given to drinking alcohol before leaving home or the dormitories (Vander Ven 2011). Before more than just sporting events, pre-gaming is used as a way to enter a drinking scene closer to the desired level of intoxication and at a lower cost. Sorority members forbidden from drinking within their houses sometimes rent offsite locations just for such a purpose (Robbins 2004).

Competitive contests often emerge among drinkers themselves, with games like beer pong and flip cup becoming popular activities (Vander Ven 2011). These, too, may

begin to exhibit ritual qualities over time. This notion of a “drinking game” can be little more than watching a certain television program or movie and drinking each time a particular event or set of events occur. Much like the extension of “pre-gaming” to non-sports activities, activities considered to be “drinking games” often involve little more than paying attention to something in the co-presence of other participants. The extension of these conceptions grounded in competition to other realms can be understood as a feature of people interacting with alcohol as a subject that can be interacted with in multiple contexts.

### **Conceptualizing the Problem**

The present investigation seeks to find out how individuals make sense of their relationships with alcohol through inquiries concerning experience and contextualized interactions with the substance. The pages above outline the theoretical underpinnings of the two main approaches of this pilot study. The first examines the language informants use and seeks to identify “purpose at hand” and the ways they put words around the act of drinking. This includes the vocabulary used to speak for alcohol as a subject rather than as an object. The second approach examines the way informants discuss their changing relationships with alcohol during the period of emerging adulthood.

The way drinkers experience alcohol and reason through encounters with it changes over time as experience, observation, and cultural messages sediment. As this happens, a relationship between two subjects, or two believed subjects, is formed. A better understanding of the diverse ways people interact with alcohol as a subject may

provide insight into the ways people think when they make alcohol-related decisions.

The next section goes into greater detail about the methods used to examine the above questions and the justification behind this approach.

## CHAPTER IV

### TALKING ABOUT TALKING ABOUT ALCOHOL (METHODS)

In order to evoke language about alcohol from informants, focused narratives concerning previous use were constructed using the active interview process. Assembling the past experience of each informant in a local and targeted manner resulted in the creation of meaning that focuses on the dynamic nature of alcohol in the lives of those interviewed.

Informants were asked to identify key associations with alcohol over time. These include exposure prior to first use of alcohol, characteristics of distinct periods of use, and other ways alcohol use by the self or others has influenced the “interest at hand” when it comes to drinking. Turning points were identified and informants were encouraged to further explore the transitions created by these points.

The act of telling biographical stories does more than tell the self and others about the life of the speaker. It also acts as a way to create and embody identity (Rosenwald and Ochberg 1992). Because life is experienced as a stream of consciousness, experiences can only be seen as discrete through a retrospective glance (Schutz 1970). The interviews conducted for this study did more than get people to talk about their relationships with alcohol; rather, they *created* this relationship with alcohol for each informant. The veracity of these relationships is made through these interviews, not

discovered by them (Rorty 1989). The role of the interviewer (Presser 2008) and the interview situation (Garfinkel 1967) in this creation should not be understated. In the instances under examination, the truth value of statements made by informants is less important than the way these were put together in the moment (Garfinkel 1967).

Interviewers, whether they acknowledge this or not, use a set of filters (the self as a person with a distinct point of view, internalized beliefs and values, presumed shared experience, the determination of relevance/irrelevance, and the search for recurring themes) to understand and guide the conversation. Informants, too, engage in the interview situation with frames of reference influenced by the physical and social context. As such, there are a number of strategies that interviewers can use to enhance the informants role (e.g., confirming interpretations, the use of silence), but the interviewer cannot be removed completely from the construction of meaning that takes place (Talmage 2012). The assemblage of a biography embraces

...the singleness of life line...in sharp contrast to the multiplicity of selves one finds in looking at him from the perspective of social role, where, if role and audience segregation are well managed, he can quite handily sustain different selves and to a degree claim to be no longer something he was. (Goffman 1963:63)

Each individual's relationship with alcohol was created and understood through discussion of these many different roles and experiences as part of a greater whole.

Attention was paid to the way each informant situated past use and patterns of drinking in relation to the present self. The narratives constructed in each conversation were dissected to identify occasions when the current self was either verbally connected

or disconnected to the self described in other periods of time. Lois Presser (2008) examined such self-continuity described by a collection of men convicted of violent crimes and found that they generally described the present self alongside with the self at the time of offending in one of three ways. Some of the people interviewed utilized a stability narrative, one that describes a consistently good person facing negative circumstances. This method tells of a self that is similar at its core across time. Another group told their life story as a reform narrative, one in which the individual makes the claim that the violent acts in question were committed by a self that no longer exists. An elastic narrative is described as containing elements of both stability and reform narratives that often conflict. The stories told by people in each group employ a particular vocabulary of motive that may correlate to the way each person see himself, as offender narratives and offender identities are both social constructions highly dependent on the situation of the moment (Presser 2008). The self is not a concrete thing or idea, but a process that involves seeing the self as both subject and object (Vander Ven 2011).

Done with a constructionist perspective, the practice of active interviewing cultivates meaning-making as part of the information collection process. This is encouraged by a recent “interpretive turn” in the social sciences that looks at both what is reported and the occasions in which this is done (Rabinow and Sullivan 1979). Considering informants as more than just a “vessel of answers” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:7) will allow for nuanced meaning construction with the interviewer that provides access to more than just what happened and what people think about them, but how they came to be and acquire meaning in the life course perspective (Holstein and Gubrium



1995). This approach relies heavily on collaboration rather than just interpretation and commentary done by the researcher.

Douglas Kimmel (1974) constructed life histories with adults through a developmental model that identifies “turning points” that cause variation in otherwise stable life progressions. These moments are often the culmination of negative occurrences over a span of time, triggering a “crystallization of discontent” at one particular point in time (Baumeister 1994). These turning points may also be the result of self-redefinition following a single meaningful event or change (Kimmel 1974). This distinction matters, as well as the role transformations that result. Active interviewing invites the assumption of roles held at different points and “narrative associations between mundane and momentous occasions to capture a more or less, if tangled, flow of life” (Holstein and Gubrium 1995:50). The assumption of these different roles and the recognition of these turning points are just some of the narrative events the interviewer impacts.

The act of role switching across time and space attempts to access the “interest at hand” an individual held at various points. This “interest at hand” determines the system of relevances we use to make decisions and otherwise engage in daily life. It is not isolated and is not constant. Rather, it varies across time, social groups, and the assumption of different roles at different points (Schutz 1970). Active interviewing encourages informants to think about different roles they have inhabited, thus providing multiple sets of data from which the researcher can use (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). This is particularly useful in discussions surrounding alcohol, as it provides access to

pieces of the lay theory of successful drinking (Denzin 1987) held by the self at different points in time as it assumes various roles.

As informants discussed their practices and thoughts about alcohol from different roles, special attention was paid to the way people discuss the actions of one role from the perspective of another. This assumption of different roles allows for some degree of role distancing giving people an opportunity to talk about the self as another person distinct from the current self. The construction of a heroic narrative, for instance, allows people to use a congruent set of vocabularies of motive and accounts to discuss previous behavior (Presser 2008). The way informants speak about question situations, whether acknowledged as such in the interview situation or not, was a key component of interview analysis.

Following the discussion about alcohol use and perspectives at different points in the life course, attention turned to the way people experience their relationship with alcohol within the context of the interview. Each was asked to personify alcohol and view their relationship with the substance over time much as they would another person. This set the stage for informants to view the role of this relationship in the development of personal identity. Having just reflected on different stages of life and the involvement of alcohol in each, informants were then asked to reflect on the impact alcohol has made on the development of his identity.

### **Informant Population**

Cultures that foster the period of identity exploration known as emerging adulthood are typically found in industrialized and economically stable countries (Arnett 2011). Increased alcohol use has also been shown to occur in these economically developed areas (Rahav et al. 2006). This pilot study maintains a Western focus, with a group of ten informants drawn from a population of college students at a public university in a mid-sized city located in the Southeastern United States.

Only those who had personal experience drinking alcohol were considered for participation in this study. Those who have kept alcohol at a perpetual distance are more likely to have done so due to a firm belief or cultural membership and are unlikely to have experienced a dynamic relationship with the substance. As the focus of this study is on changes over time, those who used alcohol at some point but have since made a commitment to refrain were eligible for participation.

The collection of interview data from college students is beneficial for multiple reasons. One reason is, admittedly, one of convenience. Classroom gatherings offer the opportunity to provide a brief description to groups of potential informants in an effort to assist them make informed decisions regarding participation. While self-selection bias is difficult to avoid in the collection of voluntary interview data, the loose parameters and active interview structure were meant to encourage participation from a wide range of informants.

College environments typically offer a wide array of social groups that socialize members to engage in different drinking practices. Binge drinking rates provide one such

example. Over 70% of traditionally aged college students who are unmarried self-report binge drinking (Wechsler and Wuethrich 2002). Gathering data from a college atmosphere provides access to a number of different approaches and perspectives that would be difficult to attain from a non-college sampling.

After an increase in alcohol consumption upon arrival at college (Adams and Nagoshi 1999), use regularly declines during college and then does so more rapidly following college (Bachman et al. 1996). This “natural reduction” (Vik, Cellucci and Ivers 2003:643) has been shown to be related to increases in responsibility and changes to the social aspects of the drinking context (Vik, Cellucci and Ivers 2003). Because changes that occur during this pattern of alcohol use coincide with the transition emerging adults make to young adulthood, the college student population provides access to people at different points of this general process and have access to recent experiences and accounts that have led them along this path. In addition to information from those students who followed along this path of decreased alcohol use, that gained from discussion with students who told of periods of increased or relatively constant drinking also proved useful in the examination of dynamic relationships with alcohol.

Half of the informant pool consisted of students who were either 21 or 22 years old. These people were in a prime position to discuss the events and factors that influenced changes in the early years of this period. The remaining half of the informants were between 25 and 30, making them able to discuss changes that have occurred in later phases of emerging adulthood and those in the early stages of the young adulthood phase. Data gathered from these two segments of the college population will serve together to

create a diverse picture of alcohol use before, throughout, and after the emerging adulthood period. As a varied pool of experiences was sought after, two participants in the older age group were classified by the university as graduate students.

A consistent gender disparity has been identified in terms of drinking frequency and alcohol use disorders (Rahav et al. 2006). Males have been repeatedly shown to drink in greater amounts (White and Jackson 2004/2005). The difference may be partially attributed to biological reasons such as the amount of body water to absorb ethanol (Ely et al. 1999), enzymatic abilities to metabolize alcohol (Yoshida 1994), and differences in neurotransmission that impact the effect of drinking on the brain (Devaud, Risinger and Selvage 2006). Looking at gender drinking disparities across nations, it becomes quite clear that there are a number of cultural differences that also lead to this difference (Cheng and McBride 2013). These include the unequal application of stigma, gender role expectations, and the availability of alcohol (Holmila and Raitasalo 2005). Given the small sample size of this exploratory study, it was decided that the addition of this variable would limit the findings.

The use of alcohol may signal one of many things to the individual: the transition from work to play, relaxation, rebellion, recreation, togetherness, and the search for companionship among others. Of interest is how people describe different drinking occasions and the meanings they associate with them. Through analysis of life histories gathered from members of the above populations, I make an effort to better understand the vocabularies people create and use to make sense of how they engage in and react to

alcohol at different points in the life span and how this impacts the construction of identity in the interview situation.

## **Recruitment**

Informants were recruited from sociology classes at a public university on a mid-sized university in the Southeastern United States. All informants were volunteers and received no payment or classroom credit for participation. Recruitment of participants occurred in 16 between classes between March of 2012 and January of 2013. In order to prevent informants believing the project was focused on criminal behavior, people were recruited from classes with a non-deviance focus. All of the classes were after the introductory level and one was a graduate-level class.

Appendix A contains the script used by the student researcher to recruit from thirteen classes using an oral presentation. Recruitment from an additional three classes took place exclusively through email. Appendix B contains the email message sent out to students in these classes. Those who expressed interest in participation in either group were sent the consent form (Appendix C) in advance and given the opportunity to ask questions.

## **Interview Procedure**

The design of this exploratory study was economical. The ten male informants were asked to describe different periods of their lives and the patterns of alcohol use in each. Appendix D contains the interview protocol used by the interviewer to guide these

discussions. Not every question was asked in each interview. These questions invited each informant to analyze his interactions with alcohol through the lens of roles held at different points in time. Discussing the events considered mundane during these different periods of drinking provided a picture of how the activity is thought about in the context of the interview situation.

Important to this approach is the segmentation of the drinking career into different periods with relatively stable patterns of drinking behavior and the use of a particular mundane understanding of alcohol. As they describe their drinking patterns in different periods, they will also be asked to reflect on the groups they drank with at each time. These groups are essentially the “thought communities” (Zerubavel 1997) that helped each person develop a relationship with alcohol. Special attention will be paid to identify cognition in these settings labeled as “automatic,” making quick use of schematically embedded information to simplify cognition, or “deliberate,” overriding culturally programmed thought in favor of critical reasoning (DiMaggio 1997).

Active interviewing techniques include interviewer-guided shifts in the frame of reference used by informants to create a rich picture of topics (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). As time passes and roles change, people begin to consider problems in different ways (Schutz 1970). By guiding informants to analyze events using approaches historical to each individual, the interviewer worked to capture a thorough picture of the changes in the relationship used to understand alcohol and its place in the life of each.

Seven interviews took place within a conference room, two occurred in an empty classroom, and one happened outside on a bench. Responses were coded by hand and

analyzed with an eye to discerning how and the words people use to describe their relationships with alcohol. As an effort was made to have categories for analysis emerge from the data rather than make use of a pre-determined set, interview data was coded multiple times. Such analysis was meant to illuminate the way each informant thinks about drinking alcohol. Similarities and differences with how each informant reasons through discussion of different periods of drinking have been noted. Discussion of shifting trends in personal drinking was studied in connection with the relationships created and discussed in the interview situation.

Throughout each stage of analysis and the resulting paper, pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of informants. These names were selected at random from a list of the most popular baby names in the year 1990 generated by the United States Social Security Administration. Only names ranked in popularity from 101 to 250 were used, and all of the actual participant names were removed prior to selection.



## CHAPTER V

### MAKING SENSE OF ALCOHOL WITHIN A FAMILIAL CONTEXT

Just as family members teach us about relationships with other people, they teach us about relationships with alcohol. Much of this socialization is purposely scripted, but some is done unintentionally. People of all ages regularly pick up cues and learn through observation of actions and conversations in which they are not active participants (Berns 2013).

During interviews, many informants discussed the act of drinking with family, particularly those in the younger age group. This behavior is described as influential in early understandings of alcohol. Those who shared this experience during the interview often framed drinking alcohol with family at a young age as either an act of cultural acceptability or an act of care and precaution rather than one of ambivalence or malice.

#### **Lessons in Culture**

Several informants normalized teenage drinking with family by appealing to the fact that teen drinking is not as tightly regulated in other cultures as it is in the United States. By bringing this up, Jay, Bruce, and Walter each justified the use of alcohol before they were of legal age in the United States.

Jay immigrated to the Southeast United States from South America at the age of ten. He mentioned that this cultural difference not only manifested in a more relaxed attitude toward alcohol in his country of birth, but also in his home in the United States.

I'm from [a South American Country]. It's...different rules...I mean...you know, you don't have to be 21 to drink, first of all, so...at the same time, there's not that urgency to turn 21 or, you know, be old enough to drink, you know. I had an older brother and sisters, they would have their parties at the house, you know.[...][My] parents would have wine or beer or, you know, sometimes with dinner, and they would always give you a sip when you were little, you know, like...but, I mean, it wasn't that big of a deal. Like, if I wanted to...to...once I came here, I, you know, people sneaking alcohol and all that stuff...I didn't see that over there. Then again, I was younger, but it...it just...didn't...it wasn't...there wasn't that urgency to do it.[...]They would make, like, mimosas and they would give me, like, a small glass, you know. But...I mean, they wouldn't get me drunk, but they would let me try things, just because...there wasn't that, like, oh no...you're not yet old enough. They wouldn't offer beers, or they offer liquor. I mean, I guess they didn't expect us to take it from them, you know. I guess some parents here, they hide and lock the liquor so kids won't have access to it. It's more strict here.

Jay (22)

Jay describes alcohol accessibility as being “more strict” in the U.S. than his country of birth. By creating this distinction early in our discussion as a fundamental part of his orientation to alcohol, Jay serves to orient his perspective as having roots in the country he and his parents immigrated from.

Bruce has lived in the United States since birth, but was also socialized by family to be comfortable around alcohol from a young age. Compared to Jay, he described this process as involving more than just his parents.

I'm Hispanic, and...you know, being Hispanic, I feel...especially when I came into college, it...the views on alcohol were, like, way different from what I'd seen from a lot of my friends. But...growing up...it wasn't really discussed. It's

something that I was always around. Like...especially like...we have a really...I have a really big family in [the Northeast United States], so for Thanksgiving and New Year's and Christmas, like...we have, like, really big parties and...where we...you know, have a big dinner, and, you know, eat some cake if it's somebody's birthday, and like, we just celebrate, dance, you know...just hang around...it's a good family time, and...there'll be 50 of us, in all different ages, from a little baby to, like, the elderly, or the elders, and then...everybody would just, you know...have family and just drink, dance, just have a good time. So, it was never really discussed, but it was something I was exposed to throughout my whole life, really. My dad...for instance, like, after a stressful day, on occasions, he...like before he'll go to sleep, he'll like, have a beer...or...not even like, he'll have like a little liquor or whatever. He won't even drink the whole thing, but it will just like...so he could knock out, relax, and then...you know, but. So, we never really spoke about it. But, I was definitely exposed to it.

Bruce (22)

Like Jay, Walter also moved to the Southeast United States from South America at a young age. Much as Jay described alcohol use in his country of birth as lacking “urgency,” Walter describes drinking in his country of origin similarly.

I may not have mentioned, but I'm [from a country in South America], and...perhaps it's just seen as different, no? I mean, growing up, not that I would say I had a family of alcoholics, but I had a family of people who...who liked to drink, you know? Getting together at night, on the weekends, you know. I've got uncles, grandparents...I mean, they would just drink themselves silly, but never, you know...it was very casual. I was around it. You know, if there was large family gatherings and this would be happening, you know, my mother will probably...you know, she'll drink...she'll drink every night, not excessively, but, you know, it's just very casual, no? It's not seen as, like, oh, these guys are alcoholics, this and the other. So...so yeah, it was very...very present, but it wasn't like this, oh my God, Uncle Bob is smashed again, you know, like...it's just part of...part of the culture, I guess. You know? But [people from my country of origin] drink...a lot. But I think that can be said for a lot of, you know, South American countries.

Walter (27)

Just as Jay talked about alcohol use in general as being “no big deal,” Walter indicates that drinking to impairment on a regular basis was seen as commonplace in his country of origin. He described family gatherings similar to the ones Bruce spoke of on holidays. They may not have quite as many people, but seem to happen much more frequently.

And then you’re...you know, you’re young, so every aunt and uncle like slips you something, thinking that they’re the only ones who have that night, so...you know, by the end of the night, you’re pretty smashed. But...yeah, it wasn’t like this taboo thing, you know? I mean, now that I’m older, looking back, I see a lot of these uncles and stuff...I mean...I guess, technically, yes, they are alcoholics, you know, but...but they’re not angry people. They’re not bad people. They’re not...do you know what I mean? They just like their drink, but they still function. They still get up the next morning, go to work early, and...so that’s...that’s really it. No history of...abuse or neglect or...you know...very happy drinkers.

Walter (27)

In this passage, Walter acknowledges that, unlike in his country of origin, these same family members would be seen as alcoholics in the United States. He then proceeds to emphasize that these people are, “not bad people.” This is, in essence, a question situation that Walter created and resolved on his own by invoking cultural differences and then appealing to qualities that transcend such differences.

Each of the statements above by Jay, Bruce, and Walter do something similar. At the very beginning of each, you will notice that each opens by stating their ethnicity. This was not something I edited text to include. In all three cases, the interviewer had just asked the informants to provide a sense of discussion about alcohol in their home growing up and this was the first thing spoken in response. By opening this way, speakers referred to a common sense understanding that expectations regarding alcohol use are

more relaxed in Hispanic and South American cultures. This serves to quickly create a context in which family-endorsed drinking is no big deal.

### **Lessons in Moderation**

Much as some informants used cultural differences to justify teenage alcohol use, others used the idea that family was interested in teaching how to drink a certain way. These people were careful to frame experiences drinking with family as lessons in moderation.

I can remember I was 13 when my dad gave me my first beer, and it was after...or, no...I guess it was 15, but what...he had moved out of [a coastal city in the Southeastern United States], and he kind of was...I guess he was trying to be “cool dad,” but we were...we were at this like...yacht club or beach club, whatever, and just gave me a...like, I think it was like a Miller in a foam cup, and he said, “Just sip on this.” You know, kind of trying to...I guess, break you into manhood, because like, I mean, he was a fraternity guy, so...I don’t know if he...you know, I don’t think he was trying to turn me into an alcoholic, but he was just, kind of...letting me experience that before I experience it on my own, you know. Which, I mean, I think I had at that point, obviously, but...as far as he was concerned, he was trying to help culture me into...socially drinking.[...]It’s like, I’d rather them do it here when I’m watching than not, because I mean, it’s kind of like...you know, you don’t want to...you know, you hope your kids aren’t, like, you know, having sex in high school, but, you know, you can’t be there for them, so you can just kind of tell them about sex, the birds and the bees, and then, you know, let them make that decision. So...so, I guess, him showing me responsibility through that...you know, telling me to sip on it.

Jorge (22)

Jorge questions the morality of teenage drinking on behalf of his father by first comparing the act to teenage sex and then saying, “you hope your kids aren’t...having

sex in high school.” Giving Jorge a foam cup with beer in it was presented as a strategy to resolve this – by teaching him how to drink slowly.

The line, “I don’t think he was trying to turn me into an alcoholic,” indicates that this lesson, as recreated at the moment of our conversation, was delivered by interpretable actions rather than words. Jorge is, in essence, projecting intent onto his father’s actions as an act of “showing me responsibility.” He similarly projects when he says that the act was done as an attempt to be a “cool dad.”

Bruce describes similar lessons aimed toward “social drinking,” but done by many members of his family over a series of occasions.

The first time I was spoken to about it was when I was...how old was I? I think I was 16 maybe, or 17? 16 or 17 or 15...one of the three, and it was New Year’s, and...my cousins...they were a little older than me, and they’re, like, oh, like, do you want to have a beer? I was like, no...like, I didn’t hit that stage for...where my family felt it was...allowable for me to drink, and then he was like, how old are you? And I said like 16 or something. He’s like, oh, well...now you need to start...you need to start learning how to drink. So, like, he gave me a beer, and...that was probably the first time I drank. And...so, that was like my first encounter, when I was like 16...on New Year’s Eve.[...] so...the way I got brought up was alcohol is...with my family, and...that’s why I feel like...like, a lot of the students here, like, their families prohibit them from drinking until they’re 21, or they don’t do it...so when they turn 21 and they’re in college, they drink and they get plastered, and...they, like, do stupid stuff. But for me, I was taught to learn how to drink, so like, I would drink with my family, and when they would say...oh, like, alright, you’ve had a little bit too much of...they’ll stop me. And, coming from your family, you’ll listen to them. And so, like, on every, like special occasions...like New Year’s, you know, Thanksgiving, like...those kind of special holidays, I would drink a little bit then, and...so, like that, I learned my tolerance and how to control myself when I drank. So, when I came here to college, and I saw...these kids just like...drinking like idiots...it’s like, they do stupid stuff. It’s like, what are you doing? It’s like, why can’t you just...enjoy your drink? But, they like drink to get drunk, but...contrary to where...I was...brought up to drink to enjoy, and you know, to socialize.

Bruce (22)

Bruce got a little more specific than Jorge as he explicitly described that he learned, “tolerance and how to control myself when I drank.” This instruction is described as a favorable alternative to the “stupid stuff” people without such direction engage in when they turn 21.

Isaac described a more dynamic influence as he talked about drinking with his brothers at a young age.

Well, my brothers were always encouraging to do the wrong thing, you know, so[...]they would be like, “Come take this shot.” You know...and my brothers would always buy the most expensive liquor out there and come to the house and have big parties and stuff, so...I was always sneaking shots and...oh, actually, but then...my step-mother...when I started living with them, she drank a little but...you know...to like...you know, drink rum and things like that, and...you know, me and my cousin would sneak, and, you know, like, steal a little bit of alcohol from the thing, you know, when nobody is looking, but never enough to do anything...just enough to, you know, be bad.[...]Eventually, it switched from being, like, [my brothers] trying to influence me with that, and then they started seeing success in my [sport], so then it became, like, taboo for me to drink. You know, like...oh, no, you’re going to make something of yourself, like...what are you doing? Put that thing down, you know, and they’d get really upset if they saw me drinking.[...]Going somewhere is what they’d say. Yeah. They would be, like, furious, sometimes. The only time it was acceptable is if we were like celebrating or something like that.

Isaac (21)

At “14 or 15,” Isaac says his brothers, who were all able to buy alcohol legally, were trying to get him to do the “wrong thing,” defined in this case as drinking at a young age. In this sentence, Isaac creates both the question situation (his drinking) and the vocabulary of motive to explain it (his brothers were encouraging it). Isaac also talks about going to “sneak” and “steal” alcohol with his cousin at around the same time. As Isaac began achieving success in his sport, his brothers strongly encouraged him to

continue his athletic pursuits. This was done, in part, by the transformation of their encouragement to drink into discouragement. In this part of Isaac's narrative, his siblings are described as part of the vocabulary of motive that addresses the question of drinking as an activity contradictory to his training regimen.

### **The Composition of Lessons**

Informants who justified teenage drinking through invoking culture and those who did so as a worthwhile education did so in a similar pattern. In each of these broad methods, the informant spoke of family members subdividing alcohol use into two types and guiding the speaker toward one of them. In essence, each familial group is described as creating a simple separation of "our" drinking from "their" drinking and then helping the narrator make a choice between the divisions. In each case, family was spoken of as having the narrator's best interests in mind. By choosing to discuss their socialization to alcohol in the manner that they do, each informant reveals a distinction he finds to be cognitively relevant.

The split that Jay creates is one grounded in culture. In the text above, he states his parents were willing to give him small glasses of alcohol because, despite his age, it was no "big deal." This is in opposition to the United States, in that, "It's more strict here." Speaking about socialization into this binary understanding of teenage drinking means he considers his initial socialization to alcohol to be built around cultural differences.



When asked about his first experience drinking, Bryant also highlighted cultural differences while describing drinking in Europe while visiting family as a teenager.

I've been lucky enough to travel a lot...you know, so my family...my grandma, actually, was born in Germany. She was like 13, 14 when World War II broke out. So, she actually escaped...she actually married a GI...she was actually in a Russian prison camp. She wasn't Jewish, but she was German, so anyways, well, I have a lot of memories of going to Europe. You know, and European culture is...even more accepting of alcohol than America, you know, I mean...we at least 21 to drink, you know. Over there, it might be 16, but nobody cares, you know. So, I remember drinking quite early...probably 10...9 or 10. I mean, not...obviously not all the time, but just, you know, with the family, maybe a glass of wine here or go into a hofbrau house or something, drinking a radler...like half...half beer, half lemonade. But, I remember from an early age...you know...that...I liked the feeling, you know. It wasn't just something to have with...with dinner. It had a pretty profound effect on me.

Bryant (26)

In this statement, Bryant indicates that these early experiences made an impact on him and led to future use of alcohol and other brain altering substances.

Bruce mentioned cultural differences, but divided the initial socialization provided by his family as drawing a fundamental distinction between those who have been “taught” how to drink by family and those whose relatives “prohibit them from drinking until they’re 21.” This instruction focused on the idea that those who have been taught are able to drink “to enjoy, and you know, to socialize” and those who have not are prone to doing “stupid stuff.” Throughout our discussion, the binary understanding of drinking behavior as being either social or “stupid” continued to come up.

In describing his socialization to alcohol by his family, Walter describes the construction of a similar dichotomy.

It wasn't really seen as dangerous, but because it was seen as just a casual thing, I think from a young age, when I was old enough, instead of...I guess I (?) a lot of my other friends, like their parents would... 'Don't drink, don't drink.' You know, my mother said, you know, it's all about being responsible about it, you know? If you're going to drink a beer, I was, you know, I was young. I was maybe 14, 15...14 the first time I got drunk. That was (?). That's another story, but...you know, if you want to have a beer here in front of me, that's fine, but do it here, and don't go and, like, hang out with your friends and do something stupid, you know? So I think it was seen more of like a...it was different. By the time I was drinking, my friends were drinking. It was just a different sort of...a different vibe, you know? These kids were like...drinking to get smashed, you know? I'm like why? I mean, if the idea is just to socialize and hang out, what's the...what's the point, right? So, the discussion on whether it was good or bad, I guess, didn't come up, but how you...how you act, you know, I think is...is very important, you know? So from a young age, I was told, hey, there's no need to be stupid. It's alcohol. You don't need to go crazy like you're...you know...a child. Just be responsible about it, you know?

Walter (27)

In this statement, Walter describes being taught that there is a distinction based on how one acts while drinking, being "responsible" or being "stupid."

Jorge did not bring up cultural differences at all during our discussion. While speaking about drinking his first beer with his father, Jorge effectively divided the field of alcohol use into two primary patterns, that of an "alcoholic" and "social drinking." That this understanding of addiction was discussed as the most rudimentary division of drinkers says a lot about the relationship Jorge has with alcohol as well as the one he projects upon his father.

When asked about discussion about alcohol with his brothers, Isaac opens with a statement that served to include moral qualifiers while describing their interactions, "Well, my brothers were always encouraging to do the wrong thing."

Not...well, my brothers were always encouraging to do the wrong thing, you know, so...I never really had to talk to them about it. They would be like, "Come take this shot." You know...and my brothers would always buy the most expensive liquor out there and come to the house and have big parties and stuff, so...I was always sneaking shots and...oh, actually, but then...my step-mother...when I started living with them, she drank a little but...you know...to like...you know, drink rum and things like that, and...you know, me and my cousin would sneak, and, you know, like, steal a little bit of alcohol from the thing, you know, when nobody is looking, but never enough to do anything...just enough to, you know, be bad.

Isaac (21)

In this instance, Isaac divides behavior into "wrong" and by extension, "not wrong." To explore this further, we can look at how he describes a conversation he had with his father about drinking.

My father, he only had like really one discussion with me about alcohol, and he just told me about...how...when he would drink, he hated the feeling of being weighed down, and how it made him feel vulnerable, so...I mean, he really left it up to me. But...he had, like...he made it sound kind of...you know...like, not so good.

Isaac (21)

This gives us a good idea of the dichotomy Isaac is using to describe his initial socialization to alcohol by his family. To put it simply, he seems to be speaking about alcohol use in general, or at least at that age, to be "wrong." In keeping with the theme of a family having the narrator's best interest in mind, Isaac's brothers began to pass a similar message as their father once Isaac began to show promise in his sport.

Eventually, it switched from being, like, [my brothers] trying to influence me with that, and then they started seeing success in my wrestling, so then it became, like, taboo for me to drink. You know, like...oh, no, you're going to make something

of yourself, like...what are you doing? Put that thing down, you know, and they'd get really upset if they saw me drinking.

Isaac (21)

Hunter described a similar socialization, but without any nuance or moral assessment.

It wasn't really talked about. I mean, there was just kind of, like...like a norm, you know. I mean, it wasn't nothing out of the ordinary to see beer in the fridge or...you know, maybe a bottle in the freezer. You know, we were told, you know, not to drink it, of course...you know, at a young age and stuff, but...yeah, it wasn't really talked about like that...like it wasn't explained or...any...real precautions given about it.

Hunter (26)

Danny uses the words "conservative" and "liberal" to describe the distinction his mother taught him as a teenager.

I know that...my mom never really wanted me to...my mom was pretty conservative. She always kind of...she was conservative in the fact that she didn't want me to do it, but she was also somewhat liberal in the fact that she said if I ever was somewhere and I ever did drink, that if I...if I couldn't...if I needed to get home or I was at a place I couldn't stay, that she wouldn't be mad at me if I called her to pick me up, because she didn't want me to drink...you know, drive drunk. So it was kind of a...really, in a way, it's a mixed message, because she didn't really want me to, but at the same time, in a way, she's kind of saying, if you do and you need me to come and get you, it's not a...you know, she wouldn't be mad at me, so...I guess I kind of got a mixed message. I grew up in a single-parent home.

Danny (30)

Danny states that "conservative" means that his mother did not want him to drink.

"Liberal" is spoken to mean that she was willing to overlook her conservative wishes in order to help her son remain safe and out of trouble. Unlike the earlier accounts which

describe their instruction as binary, Danny adds a second coupling to his description: 1) drinking and not drinking, 2) being safe and not being safe while drinking. Other lessons were described as either defining some alcohol use as acceptable or no alcohol use as acceptable. Danny talked about an emphasis on both.

## **Summary**

The first impressions with alcohol provided within the context of family and the ways they were described were important components of the relationship created at the time of the interview situation. The distinctions each informant described fundamental ways of thinking about alcohol, as either an act grounded in culture or one grounded in responsibility.

An important component of culture is the division of the world in socially agreed manners. More than just separating material in categories, culture can dictate a certain procedure of making these divisions. Both types of socialization discussed in this chapter employ rigid way of thinking to separate material. This makes use of either/or logic to separate material into unambiguous categories (Zerubavel 1997). Informants used such a rigid approach to describe lessons separating “our” drinking as compared to “their” drinking.

The fundamental distinctions described as part of this early socialization can be identified as informants continued to discuss their drinking career. These drinking trajectories described by each informant provide an opportunity to see how early socialization plays itself into the trajectory of alcohol use. Much like a first impression

acquired in other relationships, these understandings manifest themselves through the automatic cognition an individual uses to process information and make decisions quickly (Cerulo 2010).

## CHAPTER VI

### INFORMANT DRINKING TRAJECTORIES

Cognition, both automatic and deliberate, that we bring to relationships is not acquired exclusively by family. As they described different periods of drinking across the life span, informants revealed a variety of influences. Before examining the language informants used during the interview occasion to make sense out of drinking behavior, let us look at the trajectories informants used to describe the changing nature of their relationships with alcohol.

#### **Trajectories**

*Bruce (22)*

Family is of the utmost importance to Bruce. He emphasizes familial influence as he describes his orientation to alcohol, focusing on two different types of occasions:

So, it was never really discussed, but it was something I was exposed to throughout my whole life, really. My dad...for instance, like, after a stressful day, on occasions, he...like before he'll go to sleep, he'll like, have a beer...or...not even like, he'll have like a little liquor or whatever. He won't even drink the whole thing, but it will just like...so he could knock out, relax, and then...you know, but. So, we never really spoke about it, but I was definitely exposed to it.

I have a really big family in [the Northeastern United States], so for Thanksgiving and New Year's and Christmas, like...we have, like, really big parties and...where we...you know, have a big dinner, and, you know, eat some cake if it's somebody's birthday, and like, we just celebrate, dance, you know...just hang around...it's a good family time, and...there'll be 50 of us, in all different ages,

from a little baby to, like, the elderly, or the elders, and then...everybody would just, you know...have family and just drink, dance, just have a good time.

These two types of socialization to alcohol repeat themselves throughout the interviewer's discussion with Bruce. This celebratory family environment also provided the context for his first use of alcohol.

I was...how old was I? I think I was 16 maybe, or 17? 16 or 17 or 15...one of the three, and it was New Year's, and...my cousins...they were a little older than me, and they were, like, oh, like, do you want to have a beer? I was like, no...like, I didn't hit that stage for...where my family felt it was...allowable for me to drink, and then he was like, how old are you? And I said like 16 or something. He's like, oh, well...now you need to start...you need to start learning how to drink. So, like, he gave me a beer, and...that was probably the first time I drank. And...so, that was like my first encounter, when I was like 16...on New Year's Eve.

Just prior to his first year of high school, Bruce moved away from a large city in the Northeastern United States to a small town in the Southeastern United States. Even though he no longer lived close to his extended family, Bruce continued to attend these celebratory gatherings.

I mean, even nowadays, like...we always make a trip...because most of our family is in [the Northeastern United States], so...every year, we go back and visit our family and celebrate Christmas...we don't celebrate Thanksgiving, but we celebrate Christmas and New Year's. So, we go...we visit them every year, once a year...maybe twice a year in the summer. And we celebrate, and...you know...have that family. Yeah.

Yeah, just my...well, like, when, like...family would come over, from [the Northeastern United States], and come down for, like, July 4<sup>th</sup>...like, I think I might have had, like, a beer or two to like...for like our barbecues and stuff, but...those are rare, because a lot of family can't really come down, but...I mean,



for Thanksgiving, when we have Thanksgiving at our house, I'll have like a beer, but...but it was definitely not as much, so...you know.

Bruce reported that he only drank alcohol away from his family occasionally while he was in high school.

Like, when we graduated...what is that called? Like...prom...prom night, we drank. And, like, I really don't...I mean, but that...and maybe sometimes when we would go to [a mid-sized city in the Southeastern United States] to party, because it's only like 30 minutes away, but...that's probably the only times I would drink with my friends, is like prom night...like, if I can remember...but, I mean, it wasn't like...anything like [the Northeastern United States], so...

Drinking in college was relegated to the weekends for much of Bruce's college career. In the second semester of his sophomore year, he joined a fraternity on campus. This was reported to have minimal impact on his drinking.

Yeah, I mean, in the weekends, I guess...I mean, nothing really changed. I wouldn't say that because joining a fraternity...changed my drinking habits...in any way. There would be some special occasions, like...when we have, like, new brothers, like...when we would celebrate...when we would drink, but...in terms of, like, the way I drank, it was...I mean...and which is...I've seen from other brothers where they...acquire like this really bad drinking habit over a period of time, but...I didn't, like...increasingly drink, just because I joined a fraternity. It just stayed the same, so...

Following his move to an apartment complex at the beginning of his junior year, Bruce described a change in his drinking schedule to include weekdays.

I guess, my junior year is where I started, like, just like...how would I say it...just like...to watch like a football game or something, I would like, have a beer...and enjoy, like, the game...and, like...so that's when you could say, I...I started, like, drinking within the weekdays, on like...given the fact I didn't have like an exam

the next morning or whatever the next day...and I could afford it, I would just like sit down and watch TV or a sporting event and drink. So...that's where you could say that, I guess...I...I don't know how you would say that, just like, started drinking on the weekdays.

Instances of mid-week drinking were usually limited to, "Just like a beer...like, literally...a beer." The described goal was relaxation.

Now in this final year of college, Bruce has turned his attention to his studies and aspirations for a career in law enforcement.

Man...this senior year is so hard. I just want to, like, shoot myself. It's been really stressful, man, and like...last night, we had a party and I didn't even go to it. Because I'm more like...and which, I thought...and, I mean, I guess...college is different, but...senior year is so stressful, so I really, like...really don't drink as much. Like...I've never really put a lot of stress on myself...doing good in school...until this year. So, I'm like really stressed out, and like...I put pressure on myself that I need to do good to apply to grad school and actually do...get, like, good grades and stuff, so...and I still drink, though.

*Grant (22)*

The narrative constructed with Grant focused heavily on his journey of faith. He grew up in two cities in the Southeastern United States, but describes his culture of upbringing as one with a relaxed attitude toward alcohol.

Well, it was...it was probably in...during high school, my senior year...actually, no, no, no. Actually, it was probably when I was in...let's see...it was '06, so '06 was when I was a junior or sophomore, and...so...in my culture, we're pretty lenient with alcohol. Like, you could...it's like...in a European country, like, you could drink when you're like 16 or 15, so...I just...took a couple sips of wine and...you know, and drank like 2 glasses. Didn't really like it. I thought it was bitter. I didn't like the taste, and...coming into...so, that was my first experience by drinking alcohol. And then senior year...you know, just took sips, and

then...freshman college year was when I really, like, started, like drinking, like, liquor and all that stuff. But I never really liked it.

As part of this relaxed approach to drinking, Grant reports minimal discussion with family members about the substance and its use.

There was no...I would say there was no discussion. I mean, they're...when I turned, like, 18, 21 they were like, "You can drink." I mean, they didn't have anything against it. I mean, none in my family are alcoholics, so...

When Grant first started college, he reports being open to the idea of drinking.

Yeah, it was...it was some...residents on my hall...it was some of my hallmates and my roommate and another friend of mine. And, you know, he had some liquor and I was just like...you know, they were drinking, I was like...okay, you know, why not? And so...I started drinking and...then they gave me some more, and they gave me some more, and...they were just, kind of like, laughing and...they loved me being drunk, and, you know, the...the mindset that comes to my mind is like, how come they can't treat me the same as if...even if I was sober?

In part due to his increased feelings of spirituality, Grant's approach to drinking drastically changed after this event.

I...drunk to the point where I got tipsy, it was like during a time where me and my girlfriend at the time, you know, we weren't doing too hot, and...yeah, I just needed to just...experience...what it looks like to get tipsy and stuff like that. So, then I decided to do it, and...you know...we ended up breaking up, and...I think I turned away from alcohol because I didn't want to go back to having a hangover...to feeling so crappy...to feeling, like...I have to vomit, but nothing is coming out. I mean, that was probably just the worst feeling that I've ever had...just because, like...I just couldn't do anything, you know? I was just stuck, you know, in the bathroom, you know, constantly trying to throw up, but I couldn't do anything. And I just don't ever want to go back to that state.

Just because, like, I just didn't want to feel like crap. I mean, alcohol doesn't really bring any positive...it doesn't affect your body positively. It only deteriorates it, slowly but surely. And I would say...that...I mean, definitely my relationship with God has definitely...opened my eyes to alcohol and really has shown me that I don't need alcohol to be cool, to be accepted, to be satisfied, to be comforted...just because when people get drunk, they are in a different world, you know? They're just in their own world. They're not in reality, I would say, just because mentally, they're not capable to do the things that they could do sober.

This conviction is also supported by others in Grant's social circle and by the responsibility he assumes as a Resident Advisor in one of the dorms on campus.

You know, one of my good friends, you know, he's lost several individuals, because of DUI...my best friend, he's a paramedic, or aspiring to be a paramedic, and he sees it all the time. And so, I've had friends who first-hand...who have first-hand knowledge of all that stuff, and...on a college campus, like, you see that. You know, I've seen...people that I know, you know, living in a residence hall, because I'm an RA and I see that stuff. I've seen, you know, freshmen, having no idea, you know, what they're doing.

Due in large part to his experience with alcohol, Grant is working toward a career in counseling.

I mean, there's just been a lot of things that...have influenced me. I mean, that's why I want to be a...counselor working with alcoholics, just because I think that...a lot of people are...controlled by the alcohol substance. You know, they need it to...be able to...function. They need it to be able to...you know, spit game with the opposite sex. You know, they need it to...be the life of the party, which you could always be the life of the party on your own. It's just that they buy into this culture that they've kind of been brought up with, where it's because of entertainment, movies, friends, family, or anything like that. I mean, there's a lot of factors that trickle in...that kind of influence people to kind of like still hold onto that concept of why they drink, so...

*Isaac* (21)

Well, I got [to this school] by...basically, through my sport. Like...I didn't really choose...I didn't really, like, you know...choose my college. I was kind of under the impression that college would choose you...you know...with the whole acceptance...program...so...I don't know...I was recruited[...]and I came up here on a full scholarship.

Isaac first tried alcohol when he was 14 or 15 years old.

My brothers were always encouraging to do the wrong thing, you know, so...I never really had to talk to them about it. They would be like, "Come take this shot." You know...and my brothers would always buy the most expensive liquor out there and come to the house and have big parties and stuff, so...I was always sneaking shots and...oh, actually, but then...my step-mother...when I started living with them, she drank a little but...you know...to like...you know, drink rum and things like that, and...you know, me and my cousin would sneak, and, you know, like, steal a little bit of alcohol from the thing, you know, when nobody is looking, but never enough to do anything...just enough to, you know, be bad.

Isaac devoted considerable attention to his athletic pursuits throughout high school. Once

Isaac's brothers recognized his potential, they stopped encouraging him to drink alcohol.

Eventually, it switched from being, like, them trying to influence me with that, and then they started seeing success in [my sport], so then it became, like, taboo for me to drink. You know, like...oh, no, you're going to make something of yourself, like...what are you doing? Put that thing down, you know, and they'd get really upset if they saw me drinking...Going somewhere is what they'd say. Yeah. They would be, like, furious, sometimes. The only time it was acceptable is if we were like celebrating or something like that.

While Isaac continued to focus on his sport, he also found a way to drink alcohol in high school.

The style of drinking in senior year, I had a...a girlfriend who was a lot older, and there was still...and she was old enough to buy alcohol, and it was still, pretty much, like...celebratory stuff, you know, like...you know, you want to fight, or something, but...but like, when we would drink, it would be like...white rum, like 100 percent proof, and we would, you know, just try to get drunk.[...]Very goal-oriented drinking...when we did, which was still very rare for me at the time, but...but...I can't even say rare. Like...not annual either...like once every two months kind of thing.

Upon entering college, this frequency increased.

Maybe, like...once...or twice a week, we would drink. Twice a week, and then, like, there would be spurts where I just wouldn't drink for a long time, so maybe like...and it was mostly celebratory, as well, I think...after a [contest] or something like that, or...when all the freshmen finally got there, but it was...my drinking habits drastically changed, like...it was drinking more heavily...it was like, how many beers can you drink, rather than, like...before, it was like...you know...I don't know...I never stopped and counted, but it was like you wanted to have this big pile of like, beers.

Isaac eventually separated himself socially from many of his teammates. At this point, his drinking frequently revolved around women.

Even though I had a girlfriend, we kind of...I don't know...we weren't talking, and I met another girl who worked at a bar, and then that really started...I drank the whole time I was home, and I was home for another, like, 3 weeks. She worked in the bar, so...I got really good at pool. I was there all day, just...‘Oh, do you want another...’ and then she'd come over, “Do you want another beer?” And like, you know, my throat is sore, I'd dehydrated, but I'm like, “Yeah, give me that thing.’

Isaac has since settled into a drinking pattern that centers around either drinking alone or with his roommate.

It actually got a little bit more frequent...drinking a lot less with people, more by myself, because I didn't have a girlfriend. I didn't have a whole lot of friends. I had my roommate. And so...and he wasn't 21 yet. He just recently turned 21.

So...you know, you get bummed out, or, you know, you're hurting, or...you know, your muscles torn up, so...you go down...I've got a little local bar that I go to, and became a regular, you know, pretty much self-medicated. Like, any time there was a problem, you know, not that many people to talk to, so...just go down there to the bar, have a few, and then come home, fall asleep.

And then, when he is busy and I want to go to the bar, I'll maybe go by myself, but...now, it's not as...it's not as...therapeutic as it once was. It's...I'll go and I'll have 2 beers instead of, you know, instead of getting to where I want to fall asleep, and I'll talk to pretty much anybody...just at the bar, you know, just make small talk and stuff...and...I don't really go to downtown as much, where there's a bunch of people, I just go to, like, small ones. It's more...now, my drinking is more, like...I don't really like drinking Bud Light, or things like that. I only drink, like, imports or, like, really high quality, you know, ones that are like...a little bit more expensive, but I want to be able to...like...taste the beer. I want to...I don't want the beer to make me feel sick. I want it to...be, like, a nice beer. Maybe with some food, you know, like some fish tacos, or something, like a really nice, fresh...sandwich or something...some stuff like that.

*Jay (22)*

Jay immigrated to a city in the Southeastern United States from a South American country with his parents and siblings at the age of ten. He reports that his attitude towards alcohol traveled with his family.

It's...different rules...I mean...you know, you don't have to be 21 to drink, first of all, so...at the same time, there's not that urgency to turn 21 or, you know, be old enough to drink, you know. I had an older brother and sisters, they would have their parties at the house, you know. They would have...parents would have wine or beer or, you know, sometimes with dinner, and they would always give you a sip when you were little, you know, like...but, I mean, it wasn't that big of a deal. Like, if I wanted to...to...once I came here, I, you know, people sneaking alcohol and all that stuff...I didn't see that over there. Then again, I was younger, but it...it just...didn't...it wasn't...there wasn't that urgency to do it.

Jay first drank alcohol away from his family at a party during his first year of high school.

I mean, it was...at first, it was kind of like I had to convince myself that I like the taste.[...]And you have to kind of convince yourself, because...I guess it is sort of peer pressure, yeah. Even if it's not like, "Drink, drink, drink," it's just like...just because everybody else is doing it, and...you know, you're so used to it. And...yeah...I would never really drink as much as everybody else.[...]I'm the kind of person that pretends to be more intoxicated than they actually are, just so people will not, you know, make him drink more, and...and...so it was always like the...I wouldn't drink as much as everybody else. I...my freshman year of high school, actually, I was in a car accident. So, I had some trouble...and then...two years later, I had surgery, so...I...like...chugging beers is something that actually causes a lot of discomfort for me, so I don't do it, and...that's usually how kids, you know, get...hammered, I guess...just drinking fast, and I don't enjoy drinking fast, so I don't and never did it.

When I started drinking, I started doing it not because, you know, like, I needed to have fun. I did because everyone was doing it and it was more of a social thing. I wouldn't call it peer pressure. I mean, you know, because, I...it's not like I got pressured into doing it. It was just a social thing, and...but I never drank heavily, like...I will be the one taking care of people, always, and it was just never fun for me to get...blackout drunk or anything like that. It didn't make much sense.

Following this, Jay began drinking with his high school sports team about once a week.

Breaks in this pattern typically occurred when he was otherwise occupied with romantic pursuits.

Team...team bonding. It was...you know, five, six[...]people and a small periphery, but it was actually...it's pretty much that I didn't really drink with anybody else, not in high school, at least, no.[...]At some point, I was dating someone, and, you know, so I didn't hang out with them as much anymore, but I know they never stopped...four years in high school. It was pretty consistent.

When he first arrived at college, Jay's drinking drastically increased. During his second semester as a student, however, Jay reports less social drinking and spending more time with one person in particular.



First semester, intensified...most definitely. I was having fun, just meeting new people and it was just...it's what everybody was doing, and, you know...I'm trying to think of how I was really shy. I mean, I always like to say that's what helped me come out, but I never really was shy. It did...you know, it makes you more social, so it's always easier, especially if everybody else is doing it, then you join in, and...yeah, it was...it was just...definitely, for the first semester, it was...it intensified. I...I recall even a couple of bad weeks when, you know, I used to drink like 5 days out of the week, but, you know, you can only do that for so long...well, some people can do it for a lifetime. I can only for...you know, for that...one semester, and...and...you know, just partying a lot, drinking a lot.

I was dating someone; I started dating second semester, or after Spring Break freshman year, and we dated through the summer, and we broke up, like, a couple days before Christmas, so...yeah. It wasn't much drinking or going on and socializing.

Once that relationship came to an end, Jay drank with others in an attempt to rebuild his network of friends. This decreased when he felt compelled to focus more of his time on school and other projects.

Well, I started hanging out with...with my friends again. I started, you know, making friends and...so, it was occasionally a...but not...not...I wouldn't really drink to the...you know...to that point where...to be drunk. I would...I used to drink because I was just trying to make friends after, you know, the last girl I dated completely...destroyed my social life. So, I was just trying to make friends, and...my best friend, he had made a group of friends, and I sort of started hanging out with them. That was definitely more of, you know, occasional. We would do other things; we would play sports, you know. And I...I was starting to get pretty committed with school and community involvement.

I thought it was just something that, you know, you had...I guess something that I had to get over with...over with, and then, you know, focus in on whatever I wanted to do, which was actual learning.

Now preparing to enter an interdisciplinary master's degree graduate program, Jay finds time to drink occasionally with his current romantic partner.

I'm wiped out. So, I...get out of class, I go to work, get out of meetings, and then...you know...I'm home. I want to watch a movie. I want to go to sleep. Okay...I'll go to sleep...and that's how it works. A lot, well every night...it at least becomes the trend. You know, you get out of class, and, you know, spend the night together, so I either go to her house or she comes to mine, and...and we stay in, you know, either do homework, or watch Friends. That's the only show that I watch on television.[...]But, yeah, that's pretty much...that's how a lot of nights and weekends, and, you know, sometimes we go out together. You know, we make sure that...because, it's easy, you know, to get comfortable with someone and sort of forget about your friends and stuff, but that's not necessarily healthy, so, you know, we make sure we go out. Her...her friends...she's another sorority girl...but she's not really...she is in the same sorority of the girl that I used to date before, so there's kind of not a lot of good relationships, so...we don't really hang out with her friends. But, you know, she hangs out with my friends, and...we go out sometimes, anyway...go to bars, or have get-togethers, or have a couple of drinks, but...I'm usually, you know, driving, so I don't...I don't really drink that much either.

*Jorge (22)*

Jorge is a fifth year senior currently attending college in the city of his upbringing. His first experience with drinking came at a party during middle school.

My first experience drinking alcohol...I'd have to...say...the first one that I remember, I guess, would be...Halloween my 7<sup>th</sup> grade year. There was a...one of our friends, a female, had a Halloween party that she had every year, and like, she invited, like, kids from the school to come over and have a good time, and...I don't know whether we just found one of their parents' Skyy...it was Skyy Vodka, I can remember the first one I ever had, it was...not good. But...yeah, me and a couple of friends thought it would be cool just to take a couple of swigs, and it was...it was not a good experience at that point, because, you know...taking vodka in if you've never drunken [sic], or not expecting that is...you know...it was...now, I don't remember having a bad experience, but I just remember being, you know, really...disoriented.

Jorge began drinking more frequently during his third year of high school. During his fourth and final year, he participated in a weekly drinking ritual with a group of friends.

Definitely towards...once you became like a junior at my high school, it became, like, you know, a little more...where, you know, we'd have our football game on...on Friday, and then we would go party at someone's house afterwards. There was either someone who had a cool mom, who didn't care if we drank, as long as none of us drove, or...if someone's parents were out of town. So...it was kind of...you know, everyone...everyone took turns throwing parties. I lived at a townhouse, so I never had to worry about, like, you know, inviting people over...like, I've had friends over, but I've never had like a "rager" at my house or anything like that.

Yeah, they...we...we had like a little ritual. We would go get...like...half off wings at a place on Thursdays, and like, we would meet up before and, like, drink before that. So, that...senior year, that kind of became our, like...you know, it was Thursdays that we did it, so we would just...you know...have a couple beers and then we would have...whoever wasn't...because there would always be one or two people that wouldn't drink, and like, we never pressured them into drinking or, like, made fun of them for that, because, I mean...we were glad that they were driving at that point. But...yeah...that...that was my first, kind of, like...ritualistic drinking, where we would do it every Thursday. You know, not necessarily, like just because there's a party, but, you know...just because it's Thursday, we'll have some beers and go get some wings and stuff like that.

Two of these friends attended the same college as Jorge and were instrumental in the drinking pattern he established his freshman year.

They...the two that went to campus, they lived in different dorms than me, but...one of them lived in...this...this dorm in particular that seemed to be like the party hall. Like, they had the cool RA and, you know, they would sneak beer in and stuff like that, so it was...it was the place to be if you were trying to have a good time, or whatever, and...it reflected in my grades, for sure. I didn't do very well my first semester of college, because I had some early morning classes, and I would probably be drinking three or four nights a week, you know...

Once Jorge's freshman year ended and the various members of this drinking group dispersed, he joined a club sports team that gathered for what he called "organized drinking."

We did, like, come together to throw, like, parties together, I guess, so...it was...I guess...yeah, it was just us...us together, and we would just...you know, we would have our...our kind of party dates we would do. Like, you know, we would do, like, you know, either like a mixer with some girls, or we would have an open party, and like, you know, it was...it was organized, it was scheduled...and...you know. If the cops came, then it was a good party, so...

Yeah, that was...that was the first, like, organized drinking I had seen, where like, people...or, at least...like, where people would like throw in on like a keg or like, you know, throw in money for, like PJ...for like mass drinking.[...]So, it was just...I like the organization of the...like the fact that, like, people knew that the lacrosse house was where...was where you should be at on like whatever night, and it was like, you know...we would get the same types of people, but it would always be a pretty good time. So, like, even if you had the same...same group of people come every Friday, it would...it would still be...you know. It would meet your expectations, I guess, of the night.

During his junior year, Jorge and one of his teammates joined a fraternity together. At first, this led to a substantial increase in drinking.

The fraternity, to kind of...try to redefine myself, as far as like...who I wanted to be, you know. I kind of had like a...mid-college crisis, I guess you could say, as far as, like, I didn't really feel like I had a direction, and like, you know, I feel like...being in a fraternity now has given me...a more specific direction by opening me up to, like, you know, the people in the fraternity...you know...because they're...we're similar, in like...you know, some of our interests.[...]We work together, or we try to work together to, like, you know, bring out what we all do best in each other, and then help improve what we don't do so well.

It was back to [drinking] three or four nights a week, just like freshman year...and it reflected in my GPA. I made another crappy GPA in my first year in the fraternity, which, you know, the fraternity is supposed to be...you know, an aid to your...your academics. You know, having those...those guys that can tell you what classes to take with what teachers is really helpful, but...like, when...when you choose to...to drink instead of go to class, and like, you know, stuff like that, then...or drink and then have to either go to class hung over, where you're not really as engaged in the class, or just not go at all.

Following this less than desirable academic performance, Jorge focused more on his studies and less on drinking alcohol.

I was really struggling with life, like, you know. The guys in the fraternity were...they were...they were helpful as far as, like, you know, having advice, but as far as, like, setting a good example, they weren't really...doing what, you know...doing things that were productive to them graduating and stuff like that. My senior year, I made...I made good grades that semester, so I feel like I must have done a pretty good job of managing...as far as like when I drank, it probably was only at, like, you know...our social events or parties, and like...wasn't doing like...a nightly drinking thing like I was with some of the older guys in the fraternity.

I'm just trying to...I'm either, you know, focused on my work, because...the classes are more difficult, I guess, and also, like, it just requires more of my attention. It's not just like I'm taking gen ed classes that I can that I can like, you know, look at vocab words and like, you know, I've got to look at theory and like, you know, be able to dissect stuff and have...have a clear mind to do that is more...more efficient than being hung-over or being drunk. Although, I would say, sometimes when I write a paper that I don't like, or that I'm not really interested in the topic, I'll have a drink or two while I'm writing it, just to kind of make it easier...you know, it may not come out as good, but at least it's, you know, getting out.

*Bryant (26)*

Bryant was careful to position his discussion of alcohol primarily within the context of the other drugs he uses. His first experience with drinking came while visiting a family member in Europe.

Well, I've been lucky enough to travel a lot...you know, so my family...my grandma, actually, was born in Germany. She was like 13, 14 when World War II broke out. So, she actually escaped...she actually married a GI...she was actually in a Russian prison camp. She wasn't Jewish, but she was German, so anyways, well, I have a lot of memories of going to Europe. You know, and European culture is...even more accepting of alcohol than America, you know, I mean...we at least 21 to drink, you know. Over there, it might be 16, but nobody cares, you know. So, I remember drinking quite early...probably 10...9 or 10. I mean, not...obviously not all the time, but just, you know, with the family, maybe a glass of wine here or go into a hofbrau house or something, drinking a radler...like half...half beer, half lemonade. But, I remember from an early age...you know...that...I liked the feeling, you know. It wasn't just something to have with...with dinner. It had a pretty profound effect on me.

While he did drink with his friends in high school on occasion, Bryant discovered that he preferred the effects of other substances. The pursuit of the feelings brought by these drugs and their various combinations nearly had a disastrous impact on his educational progress.

I was in, like, GT classes, you know, I was kind of ostracized for mainstreaming, though. So, like, I had this yearning to really want to fit in, you know...because I was a smart kid, you know...kind of...kind of nerdy, not really...I mean, I was also...I mean, I was always...able to make people laugh, but...you know...and I didn't really get picked on, but I wasn't really popular, you know? And like any kid, you know, I wanted that, and then I realized, you know, I can make people like me by making fun of people or cracking jokes, and then...I guess, the alcohol and drugs just came with that, you know.

I had friends that really preferred the alcohol, and they would drink, like, every day after school, whereas I got more into the marijuana, because I found with alcohol...now, granted, like, on a Friday or Saturday night, I don't want to smoke weed, because that's an everyday thing...because marijuana, once you've done it a few hundred times, it's just another buzz.[...]I realized that...if I didn't have a lot...instead of drinking like ten beers or ten shots to get really wasted, or smoking a lot of marijuana, I realized I could just smoke...I could just drink like 3 or 4 beers and then smoke a little bit of marijuana and then...the combined effect was greater than just the addition of both of them.

I actually almost didn't graduate high school, because I...I flunked out junior year, and then, luckily, where I lived, it's a big area, they had an alternative school. So, I went there and I actually did 2 years...I did my junior year and my senior year in one year.

Following graduation from high school, Bryant continued to experiment with drugs.

I went from alcohol to the marijuana to cocaine. I was really into cocaine. But, I did...I mixed the cocaine and alcohol, which...when you mix cocaine and alcohol, it actually makes a third drug called cocaethylene inside your body, so it's kind of like this...this...you know, poly-drug effect, like I talked about with the marijuana and alcohol. But marijuana and alcohol don't actually make a third drug, but...alcohol and cocaine actually fuse...in your liver and make...or small intestine...somewhere in your body...to actually make a third drug, and it...you know, because the...the alcohol counteracts the uppy...the upper, speedy effect of the cocaine...If I drink a 6 pack before I do cocaine, then...then it would take the edge off, you know. And you can just keep pounding beers if you're doing cocaine. So...I...I mixed the cocaine and alcohol for a while...Once I found opiates (snaps)...and in a way, opiates are similar to alcohol. I mean, they're both central nervous system depressants, and, you know, it's the same direction.

I always joke that, you know, alcohol is like an opiate addict's best friend, because I know a lot of people...a lot of opiate addicts, or opioid abusers that...when they ran out for whatever reason, they didn't have enough money or their connect ran out, they would...almost everyone I knew, myself included, would fall back on alcohol...and not just out of boredom or out of...you know, especially with opiates. It's not like...like...you know, I just want to get screwed up on something, but something about the alcohol is sort of comforting...for...you know...it almost like, it tickles...even though I know it

doesn't tickle the opioid receptors. It's almost like it's a similar kind of effect, but...so, yeah...so, for me, by the time I...I mean, I had first tried opiates when I was 14, and it did blow my mind, but I didn't really become...it didn't become my drug of choice per se until maybe like I was 17, 18, and then...it has been ever since, but...you know, there's been periods that...that I drink. Like, I went to Thailand...I've actually been there three times, but this last time, I went...and...I went...I was cold turkey off of methadone, so...needless to say, I got pretty...I withdrew for about a week of two, but...but while I was there, I mean, I drank.

This pattern of substance use continued to some extent through two years of community college and some of his current bachelor's program. He is currently in treatment for his opiate addiction.

When I was 17, 18 my parents retired and they moved down here. They bought a house...built a house actually, so...I ended up...kind of drifting around, and I ended up doing community college, but I...I did rather poorly. I wasn't very focused and I was...partying. Not really partying, but using substances, and...and it wasn't all that. It was immaturity too, but I...basically, I ended up...finally...I worked at a couple of places and then I had a couple of pretty bad semesters, but I accrued a couple of credits, and then finally...I finished my last year of my associate's. You know, they have a program where, you know, it's...you do...I didn't actually get my associate's degree, but I had about 2 years and then I transferred [here].

There was a time when I first moved here and I wasn't on the methadone clinic and I didn't know where any opiates were...I would drink every night, and I would drink 6, 7, 8, 9 Coronas after work, just sitting around watching TV and passing out. So, I mean, I can understand how it can be an everyday thing, but...but now, since it's nothing special, I really only do it for a special occasion...and, because now...like, back then, alcohol was the everyday thing, and finding opiates is hard, if you don't go to methadone clinic and you don't live in a city, like near Baltimore or D.C., where there's open-air drug markets, it's hard to find pills. You have to know people with prescriptions, so...opiates were like a treat. But, now, I do fucking methadone every day; I don't even feel it, really. So, now, alcohol is like a special treat.



It's weird now, because...like, yeah, like...I don't really go out. Last few semesters...last year, I did. I had some cool roommates. I tried to do the social thing, but just with opiates...and some people it affects more than others, but for me, it just really...I'm not going to drink. In fact, you're not even allowed, technically, to drink on the methadone clinic because it's so dangerous to use...most deaths from heroin or methadone, it's...because you mix it with a central nervous system present like alcohol or benzos. They'll actually not dose you, or kick you out, if they find out you're drinking. But, I don't care about that. But...I just didn't drink because, yeah...and I don't really have that many friends here, because I don't need them, you know...I...you know, my parents just think, you know, I'm just concentrating on school, because I'm getting excellent, stellar grades, but it's not that hard. I mean, I'm not working, and...I just fucking sleep all the time.

*Danny (30)*

Danny is a graduate student who has been married for three years and has a daughter approaching two years of age. Growing up in a rural area in the Southeastern United States, his first experience drinking alcohol occurred at a party thrown by teammates during high school. These parties became a regular occurrence.

You know, the people that I hung out with in high school, I mean...I think it's pretty common that...that, in high school, a lot of kids will drink alcohol. I don't think it's a mystery to many people, but I think I had gone to a party. That's probably one of the first parties I got invited to, I guess, around...around my sophomore year. I played baseball and I played football, so, obviously, I hung out with that crowd, and...they had a party and there was alcohol there, and I think that was the first time I ever drank alcohol.

It became a...I guess, a regular thing after that. I mean, I wouldn't say that it was...a weekly thing, but I mean, it was pretty common after that to...to drink.[...]There would be different parties that the people...different people would have, but pretty much the same types of people, or the same people would be there. I mean, it was a fairly...I guess...I wouldn't say a tight-knit group, but...I didn't grow up in a very large community, so...there wasn't a lot of people. When you...when you deal with a...I mean, it had a relatively large high

school that...you know, the football team, the baseball team are...it's a small group of people, so those were generally the people you'd be around.

After losing an athletic scholarship due to injury, Danny attended two public universities and reports different drinking patterns at each.

It's not that I didn't drink, but I guess my drinking wasn't out of...necessarily out of hand. I didn't drink to intoxication while I was [at the first school]. So, I guess the first year and a half of college, I didn't. Because, you know, I've always really been more of a...kind of a studious person, so...I mean, I would go to parties and whatnot, and...I think that first year of college, I...even though I wasn't that far away from home.[...]I went home a lot, so I didn't stay during the weekends to go to a lot of the parties like some people did. So, I guess, the really drinking...heavy drinking happened when I transferred to [the second school].

It was...a little bit more...available, [at the second school]. And maybe it is because I stayed, but, you know, it wasn't just fraternity parties or anything like that. They were just...I mean, people just had parties and you just listened around and showed up. But, really, I would...we really drank a lot around...the funny thing about it is, I think, one consistent thing throughout my drinking over the years is that I've drank with pretty much the same people in the same setting.[...]I mean, we didn't really have to go very far to drink, plus we didn't have to drive, so, I mean, we'd typically...I mean, we would go to parties, sometimes. When I was dating a girl up there, she liked to go to different peoples' parties, so I would go to different parties with her, but typically I would always pretty much drink with the same people.

In the years since college, Danny has devoted less time to drinking alcohol and more to other aspects of life.

I didn't drink a lot when I [worked in law enforcement], except for...after work, have a beer or two, or, you know, on my days off, when...I've got, you know, working outside in the yard, whatever, have a couple of beers...I had a career, because I was in law enforcement, so that kind of limited the amount of...the schedule that I had, as a patrol deputy, limited the amount of free time that I had to go and...you know...have get-togethers, but...excuse me...I would

say...no...it's, it's...before Monday, it had been about four years since I had any...any type of alcohol, and that was just a couple of beers. I did, recently, go to...a Total Wine & More place that's right up the road from where I live, and got a...a case of beer, of German beer, that I like, and haven't really been home much this week to...to drink any of it, and...I mean...to me it's not that big of a deal to come home and have a beer or something after...after class, or...you know, but I've just been so busy that I haven't.

I mean, the girlfriend I had before my...before I met my wife. I met her for the first time at one of our little gatherings where I got pretty intoxicated, and, you know, made advances at her, even though she had a boyfriend at the time. I don't regret that one, though, because we ended up together later on, but...wow. I never thought about...I just think I made a...a decision when I...at a certain point...when I quit law enforcement and my grandfather passed away, it was around the same time, I started working for the family business full-time, before I came back to school...I just made the decision one day that I wasn't going to drink...much...if I drank any more, I wasn't going to drink to intoxication. I wasn't...I'm not saying I wasn't going to...I was not going to drink period, ever again, but I guess I made the decision that I was going to...when I drink socially that I would drink responsibly, again, and...and it just led to a...I guess a 4 year sobriety, up until Monday, I guess. I mean, not sobriety because I didn't get drunk, but you know what I mean, that I just didn't drink anything for about 4 years. But I never sat around and said, no, I'm not going to drink any more.

### *Emmanuel (30)*

Much of the alcohol use throughout Emmanuel's drinking career has revolved around music, both as a performer and a listener. The first time he reports purposefully drank alcohol was with a friend and his or her older siblings.

I think it was probably when I was, like...I was pretty young. Maybe like 12...so...well, aside from just like grabbing one out of the fridge...like a beer out of the fridge by mistake. I did that once or twice, maybe even before I was 12, but quickly spit it out when I realized what I had done. I think the first time I drank was when I was 12, with some...12 or 13, with some older...with some friends' older siblings at a friend's house, I believe it was.[...]It was me and a few friends, and one of the friends' older sibling, and some of their friends. And they weren't way older than is. I mean, they might have been like 15 or 16.

I hung out with a lot of people that...we got to hang out in a pretty big group. We had a...one of my friends had a basement that was like our band's practice area, but it was really good for having a whole lot of people over. Like the basement encompasses the length of the house, so...it's pretty sound resistant to, so we could have a pretty good amount of people there without really causing any...noticeable trouble outside of the basement, I guess you could say.

After I got older, there's a lot of different people I would drink with, and...especially just going out to clubs and bars, or, you know, whatever, and...a different group of friends, too. You know, some of the same people, but a lot of new, different people...but no one, specific group. I drank with a lot of different people.[...]If there's a band or something like that playing that we wanted to hear...go there and...listen to the same kind of music and go to the same kind of clubs and bars, so you ended up running to basically the same people, and...you know, I got to know a lot of different people...especially when I was working at places. At that point, I really got to know, you know, a whole, whole lot of people...that, on like a...an acquaintance basis that would...approach me, talk to me, really regularly.

DJing at parties and there's typically drinking going on at parties, and...you know, you just participate in that...even people offer you drinks, I guess, like, when you're the entertainment, you get...also in a lot of places you play, that's part of, like, they pay you and give you drinks, and buy you a cab...a lot of times, even. And...so, yeah, those things kind of go...hand in hand. Yeah. That's kind of like what you were saying about...like drinking is not the focal activity, but it might be for some people that hang out in those kinds of settings...you know, to hear concerts or DJs or whatever. But yeah, there's...they co-exist...whether or not that's your individual reason for going to stuff like that, like I'm sure there are plenty of people that do things like that for the purpose of drinking, but that's not...I mean, that was never my...real focus. It's just...incidental to what I was doing...I don't really [DJ] a lot anymore.

At the time of the interview, Emmanuel described a decrease in drinking and a change in venue.

Every once in a while when I go out, I'll...yeah. I mean, I'll plan on probably drinking, so I'll go ahead and find out, like a different...like, a ride situation...and...you know...but that's not very common either. I don't really go

out a lot anymore...a pretty big reason for that. But...yeah, like, if I know I'm going to something, especially that's going to be all night, like I go to...some rave-type parties or something, I know I'm going to be there all night, I usually drink on those nights...and get...a little bit intoxicated. I don't ever really get really drunk anymore, ever.

Yeah. It's usually, like, with a meal. Most often. I drink wine with dinner, sometimes. Or, sometimes I'll drink a beer, like one beer at night when I come home, because I...my roommate buys beers, different kinds of beers, like designer beer or microbrew or something like...whatever it's called...and...so, sometimes, I'll just have one of those, just because it's there. Some of them are pretty good.[...]Definitely just drinking for flavor, just...you know...just to have a good drink. Like...every once in a while, too, I drink liquor. Like, I keep...I like really good scotch. I usually have a good...some good bottle of scotch that I'll have a drink of sometimes.

#### *Hunter (26)*

Hunter refers to himself as an “inactive gang member” and connects his drinking behavior at various points to these other community-based activities. He began drinking much earlier than any of the other people interviewed.

When I was 7, I just...I had a sip.[...]I was curious, and my dad let me taste his beer...You know, just a little...swig. When I was 12, we were hanging out at a friend's house...where we had obtained some alcohol, and...like...we drank for the purpose of, you know, getting messed up.

I wouldn't say I would get drunk every time, because, you know, when you're that young...it...it's not really readily available like that, so, you know, if we did get some, we might get like one 40 ounce and maybe like me and two other friends would share it. So...we would definitely get a buzz, but as far as, like, getting drunk like that...no, not every time. But it would happen frequently.

Hunter moved to the same city he currently resides shortly after these early encounters with alcohol. He resumed a similar style of drinking in this new location.

The first time I drank when I was in [my current city]...I guess it wouldn't have been too long after I got here, so I guess I was probably still around 13, maybe 14 at the time...and my older brothers lived down here. My one brother, he was 6 years older than me, so it was a lot easier for him to obtain alcohol, and he was kind of like a...you know, he's your older brother...you kind of want to be like him, you want to follow kind of what he's doing...copy what he's doing. And him and his friends used to drink, and, you know, me being a younger brother, I'd try to tag along and...I guess it was also kind of fun, you know, for them, you know, to kind of get me messed up, because I'm young and, you know, you just do stupid stuff when you're young, so...but the first time I drank with them was...at my father's house, because that's who I moved down here with. I lived with my mother up there. I moved down here with my pops. And...my dad had went out for the night, and my brother had a couple friends over...and they brought a bottle...I guess it was probably vodka. I don't remember the brand or anything like that. And, I remember it tasted like rubbing alcohol. It was very strong and potent...it didn't taste good at all...burned my chest and my throat, and, you know, they're all laughing at me, because I'm over here like choking and (makes gagging noise)...but...yeah, I mean, you know, after...after, you know, a few sips, I mean, anybody that knows, I mean, after a little while, it becomes not as harsh...and becomes easier to go down. So, before I knew it, I had drank way too much and was very sick...and that was also a point of...I guess amusement, you know.

Older peers in the neighborhood were identified as very influential in Hunter's early drinking.

Well...where I came up, I was a member of a gang, so when I came here, it wasn't really prevalent like that...as far as like gangs and stuff go, but you still had like...small neighborhood cliques, just like groups of friends, and...I guess...it kind of serves the same purpose as a gang, it's just a difference of kind of how your neighborhood was constructed throughout time, and...but it still serves the same purpose as far as...the group of friends were a support system...many were older, so it was a kind of a peer thing...you want to be like the older guys, so you kind of want to copy what they do, whether it's good or bad...if that's your...your example, that's what you're going to follow. So, it's just kind of the thing.

Hunter reports drinking, “pretty much about every day,” from the ages of 17 to 22.

I used to drink a lot. I mean, I used to go out every day to... I mean, even if we went to lunch, you know, we'd go to a restaurant or a sports bar and I'd have, you know, a couple of drinks with lunch, you know... and then... we might sit there for another hour and have some more drinks, and then we'd leave and go do whatever. Then dinner time would come around and we'd go out for dinner and be drinking at dinner, and now it's night time, so we'd just... take it from there to going out to another bar and then to a club, and so it was just kind of consistent. It was more of a... it was like an all-day thing, really. I mean, you know, it wasn't nothing abnormal or anything seen as abnormal at that time with that group of people to be drinking, you know... I mean, we'd start drinking at 1 o'clock in the afternoon. I mean, that wasn't... you know... un-normal. It was... it was just something that happened.

At the age of 22, drinking became a less frequent occurrence.

I started going to clubs and bars and stuff at like 17, so by the time I was 22, I wasn't really too interested in going out, I guess because I was able to go out... so it kind of lost its... excitement, almost... and kind of... it's like I've been there and done that already. You know, when people at my age were kind of just starting, I've already been through all of that. You know, people were like, ah yeah, we're going to the bar. Well, I've been going to the bar for 5 years. It's not a big deal to me anymore, you know... so I think it was just a... it lost a lot of its... I guess... excitement and adrenaline to it, because it wasn't... you know... it was... it just... because it was okay for me to do it, I guess it just lost that excitement, because I was finally of legal age and stuff like that. The older I got, like around 21, I didn't even go to a bar for my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, because I had been going to bars for years... and I had been working in clubs since I was 18 years old.

This continued for 2 years, until Hunter resumed drinking almost every day, but only in smaller amounts.

I wasn't really involved in anything as far as like productivity... as far as like school or... or really anything going on, you know, so... it was... I guess an idle time, you know, just creates problems... and kind of gets you in trouble.[...] Probably at least every other day, if not... almost... every day, but it wasn't a “drink to get drunk” type of thing. It was just kind of... we're hanging

out, have a drink or two...type of thing...and, of course, you know, when we still go out, we get really drunk.

After a year of this, Hunter began drinking less and became more focused on his career of choice.

Just...just different circumstances. Just kind of...became more occupied with...with going to school...more productivity...kind of wanting to change myself and my direction, and...noticed...you know, I tried to do it with...keeping the same kind of schedule or habits, but it was quickly easy to determine that you can't really...continue the same habits when you're trying to be productive than when you weren't productive, so...I just kind of became more...more focused. And I found what I wanted to do, and it was something that I wanted to do as opposed to like...I didn't really just see it as a job. I saw it more as like something that I would actually enjoy doing, so it took it seriously.

My goal is to...work with nothing but youth gang members. Because I personally believe that you cannot...you can't really change a situation or influence a situation as much as somebody can who has been there. You know, it's just like here at school, with...you know...you want...advice about a theory class, you would go to, you know, our theory professor. You wouldn't go to...a geology professor, do you know what I mean? So...I think that it's a lot easier for...and I can speak from personal experience...like, I didn't want to listen to any of my teachers or anybody who was trying to tell me to do something different, because in my eyes, you haven't been there and done that, so you can't truly relate. But if you have somebody who has been there-done that, and has actually changed themselves for the better, then you kind of believe that it's possible.

*Walter (27)*

Walter would spend his summers and breaks during how youth in South America, where the majority of his family resided. This provided the scene for some of his earliest encounters with alcohol.

The first time...no. Like I said, you know, you always have that, you know, "Here, have a sip," or something like that. I remember the first time I got drunk.



That was actually back in [South America], at about 14. You know, and my cousin, he's older...he's like 2 or 3...but that's who I always used to tag along with, so he was going to parties. And over there, it's a little different. The age is 18, but when you're on the west coast, it's like...more rural, no? So it's like, if you can reach the bar, you're pretty much set. Like, you're alright. And I was always a little bit taller, so I never had issues...so we went to some, like, college party, or some party, right? And....yeah...it didn't take much, but, like, I'm drinking...you know, you try to act cool if you don't like...let yourself...get held back...like hold yourself back. You drink with the rest of them, so I got pretty...pretty smashed. Nothing embarrassing, like I didn't puke or anything, you know? But...yeah...that's, I mean, the most...the first time I can remember...like...you know...drinking, no?

After this, it became kind of regular, where it was...you know, going on the summers, and, yeah, I mean, our relationship wasn't based around drinking, but he was at that age where he would, you know, he liked to go out to bars on the weekends, and I'm not going to stay behind, you know? It was fun. You know, we'd go around and hang out. [South America] is a great time. Again, just the cultures are...I mean, yes, there's a lot of drink involved, but it's not like...it was very fun, very casual, very social, you know. A lot of dancing, a lot of...good times.

In the Southeastern United States, where he lived most of the year, Walter tells of a different progression of alcohol use during parties while in high school.

The parties tended to have most everyone there, but, you know, I had my couple of friends who I hung out with the most, and that seems to be the...I also started driving a lot later, so it kind of pertained to my neighbor, and people in the neighborhood...The people in my neighborhood went to other schools, so there was kind of, I guess, this mix. You know, sometimes I'd hang out with them, sometimes with my high school friends. But for the most part, at that point, I guess it was a transition too, because I started going to this high school, so I started hanging out more with my high school friends...and less with the neighborhood friends, then slowly became more strictly with my high school friends, no? So, I guess that was that transitional period. But, yeah...yeah, for the most part, it was the same, same people.

From freshman to, say, senior year, [there was an] increase [in drinking]. Yeah, totally. Because you're older. You can get your hands on it a little easier, you know. You meet older...a lot of my friends when I was a senior in high school were now in college, you know, so they could buy beer and you could ask them to buy beer. Before, you know, "Hey, mister..." was pretty popular. You know, you stand outside of a gas station...and we had...we had another...totally separate cousin of mine move in with us, who was older. He was, like, 25, and he would buy me beer.

Walter attended his first year of college in South America, where his levels of drinking increased dramatically.

Huge mistake, cause I didn't...I mean, I wasn't a good student then, what was I going to do in [South America] without my parents, you know? Easily, you know, I was...18 at the time. I can drink there legally, so...yeah. So then there was a significant increase, because every night, I would party. Wouldn't go to class, but...yeah[...]I'd be out every night, so...I'm also someone who just goes out, and like I meet new people, and I enjoy doing that, so...even if I was by myself, I'll go out and just meet people at the bar and hang out with them, and...I'm a social...sort of...social butterfly. So, yeah, it increased significantly at that point. So much that I ended up failing out, but, you know.

Following this, Walter saved money working in a restaurant to attend a public university in rural part in the Southeastern United States. When he received a job offer, he left school.

It was a tough year. It was...just not a lot to do there. You know, I had some friends, but...it was very, very southern, you know, so I guess, their partying ended up being this...again, this field party idea. No bars, so just house parties. This may sound bad, but it was a pretty grimy spot, you know, as far as just like drugs, and...just...yeah, pretty...pretty grimy, all around. I'd go out. You know, I made some friends; I'd go out, but it wasn't really my scene. I don't know, this whole...southerners, I guess, are...you know...tended to stick together, you know what I mean, and I wasn't always...really welcome in a lot of the social circles, you can say. So, I had my group of friends; we'd hang out...The drinking was casual, but...yeah...there's really not a ton to do, so you really couldn't find yourself doing a lot.

When...the opportunity presented itself, my friend was like, "Hey, I'm starting a construction clean up business in [a different state in the Southeastern United States]. I want you to run it." Because I speak Spanish, and there's...I mean, down there, it's like...it's a must to have somebody who speaks Spanish, so...I said, "Yes, let's go." Yeah, I was out of there.

Drinking during this period became less frequent due to limited funds and time. This was especially true once he obtained a job with more responsibility and resumed his studies.

Things got real expensive. That construction clean up business ended up kind of not doing so hot, but...I was taking a couple of classes at the community college. I didn't really hang out with anyone from there...at all. Worked at this restaurant, just to pay the bills until I figured what I wanted to do with myself, and yeah, we would go out, but again, it was expensive. We went out and get drunk, it was like 100 bucks, do you know what I mean? It's not like here, where if you got 20 bucks in your pocket, you can go out and you can get drunk if you'd like.

Went in for an interview [with a contractor], and came in as a superintendant, which is pretty nice. It was a family connection, someone knew the CEO, and...that just went really well. For 4 years, I just moved my way up. Ended up project manager while I was, like, what? 22...no, like 21...yeah, so running like 20 commercial construction projects at once...And then I started going to school at night, so...going back to the drinking, yeah, it was really...during the week, I wouldn't. Friday, Saturday nights, I would go out with friends, have a few drinks. But again, because of my hours, I was just always so tired that I didn't really go out too late. So, I cut back significantly.[...]I had a different mentality. My mentality was hey, let's go to school, let's finish, so we can, you know, move on. I was a little older at the time, and after, you know, my schedule shifted, you know, I'd go out Friday and Saturday nights, but it was a different sort of...it was very casual drinking with friends.

Once Walter was ready to enter a degree program, he moved in with family near his current school and got jobs that would help him achieve his goal of working with self-sustaining orphanages in either Central or South America.

It hasn't. I mean, it's been pretty steady...like, the same. Now that I'm not in the restaurant, now having the afternoons off, I'm more likely to go grab a beer at [a bar near campus], say, and just, you know, hey, I'm out of class, or I got off work, because I work some crazy hours. Let's grab a beer. Have a couple beers, go home, study. So, I'm more likely now that I have the time and I know that, you know, I don't have to...I don't work until late and then get up early, and now, you know, I can have those couple beers, study, go to bed at a decent hour, wake up... So, I guess it's changed...you know, it's more, but not significant enough to where it's like...I'm not getting drunk; I'm just having a couple beers after work...on occasion...more often.

## **Summary**

The trajectories described above do not only contain descriptions of the drinking experiences and environments each informant considers to be a part of their drinking career, but also the way they each describe it at the time of the interview. Informants often described their changing relationship with alcohol in conjunction with at least one other component they consider to be important in their lives. Grant spoke a lot about religion a lot while describing his drinking. Isaac, in his narrative, fit alcohol consumption around his athletic endeavors. Bryant discussed alcohol use in relation to his use of other drugs. Each person effectively linked drinking to one or several of these other aspects of his life and found language that encompassed both alcohol and these other focuses. Isaac, for one, described his drinking as “competitive” on more than one occasion.

In the chapter to follow, we encounter the vernacular of grammars of drinking that reflect in many ways the initial family orientation to alcohol and the trajectories of alcohol use described as leading up to life as a college student.

## CHAPTER VII

### GRAMMARS OF DRINKING

People relate to objects through language. It structures the purpose, significance, and utility that each person seeks and is likely to find in these interactions. This chapter has focused on diverse vernaculars of drinking created and employed by informants in the interview situation. The distinctions expressed through language organize the relationship each person maintains with the substance. It helps describe intent and simultaneously create different lay theories of successful drinking from which informants may choose.

In this chapter, we first focus on the way informants use language to make sense of their interaction with alcohol at the time of the interview and how they attempt to maintain control in their relationship with the substance.

#### **“Drinking”**

Due to the prevalence of alcohol use and the frequency with which it is just described as “drinking,” the word has taken on a unique meaning. When someone says, “I need a drink” or “I was drinking while playing pool,” people frequently know that the beverage being discussed is alcoholic. To this point, qualifying nouns are frequently added when describing the consumption of other liquids in the United States, as in “I need a drink of water,” or, “I was drinking iced tea while playing pool.”

Some informants used the same word, “drinking,” to convey different meanings. The most common use of the word was to describe the act of, well, drinking. This is evident when people use the word to describe just taking sips of the substance.

I just...took a couple sips of wine and...you know, and drank like 2 glasses. Didn't really like it. I thought it was bitter. I didn't like the taste, and...coming into...so, that was my first experience by drinking alcohol. And then senior year...you know, just took sips, and then...freshman college year was when I really, like, started, like drinking, like, liquor and all that stuff. But I never really liked it.

Grant (22)

This distinction is also apparent when informants discuss drinking and drinking to the point of intoxication in successive sentences.

I mean, even though my first drink was probably maybe around 9 or 10 or 11, I mean, maybe by 13, I was...you know, drinking to get screwed up, socially...with friends, you know, after school or on the weekends, quite commonly.

Bryant (26)

For some people, however, the act of drinking necessarily implies intoxication. As such, the word “drinking” often means drinking to intoxication. When asked what the worst part of drinking alcohol is, Jay answered as if intoxication is an understood part of “drinking.”

Interviewer: So, what for you is the worst part of drinking alcohol?

Jay: I don't really get hung over, but I have, like, one time. I mixed a lot of stuff. That's definitely bad, but that's not the worst. In general, I have never experienced it...like...to...you know...but, you've got to be responsible, you know. I mean, that's common sense. You can hurt people...when you drink, you know. It has effects on your body and the way you think and the way you react

and act, and sometimes, you can hurt people. And, to me, that's the worst thing. I think that...it's always sad when someone hurts themselves, but...at least, well, you know, it's something you know is your fault, but...but alcohol also makes you vulnerable, so other people can hurt you. So, I guess it's just...it has the potential of hurting people, in general, and I think...that's the worst thing, because...some things you can't take back, or, you know...just say sorry. Some things are really...you know...they make an impact forever and...that's the worst thing, not to be depressing. But...yeah. I think...I think I'll leave it at that. I think, the worst thing is you can hurt other people, or...it makes it...possible for people to get hurt.

Jay (22)

That's something I learned from...just drinking. Like, I would drink, and then...I would go home on a car ride home, and then, like...I wake up, and then be like, how did I get here? And it was like, oh, I remember now. Like, remember everything that happened at the party, but...when I went in the car and sat down, I kind of...kind of forgot, but now I remember. So, it's like, okay, that's what happens. When I drink, I can't be sitting down, or else I'll just blackout. So, most of the times, when I do drink at parties, I just like walk around da da da, so...that's like something I learned from personal experience.

Bruce (22)

In this instance, intoxication is as much a part of drinking as ingesting the liquid. Some people can alternate between the two meanings in successive statements, thereby indicating that "drinking" shall be taken from that point forward to mean drinking to intoxication. When this happens, the speaker provides a definition of the word that will be used.

I prefer to binge drink, I'd rather have no alcohol than 2 beers. I don't like that feeling. I don't like the feeling of one beer or two beers. Because I can feel half a beer. I can feel a few sips, I shit you not. And some of it might be psychological, but...everyone talks about how tough they are with their big tolerance. You know, I can feel a beer. I'm not wasted, but...I don't like that effect. Like, I don't enjoy it. It's gross. It's a chore to have to drink...or, that's why I usually just drink liquor, because it's easier. Of course, it tastes like shit. But...yeah, I mean...it's just a substance to me, and...I have no control over how much I drink, you

know...if I get past that point, you know. Sure, pay me a thousand bucks, I could drink 4 and stop, if I had to, but...if I'm in a club setting or something, it's...it's definitely...it's going to be binge drinking. It's going to be...until I...I don't usually throw up, but it's to the point where I don't want to drink anymore, because I know...I'm one beer away from getting the spins or getting sick. So, I'll drink until I basically can't anymore...or I fall asleep.

Bryant (26)

This redefinition can be established by merely emphasizing a word.

Really. I wouldn't say I *drank*. I would say that I just...I would say...actually...no...yeah, I did drink. I took a couple of beers, like 2, 3, 4...something like that.[...] I mean...friends in high school were playing beer pong, and...it was just...the social aspect, and everyone was drinking, and so I was like, why not.

Grant (22)

This was not the only dimension that informants used to define drinking. Throughout our discussions, informants revealed that they think about “drinking” in different ways at different times in more ways than just the amount. Informants regularly categorized their own alcohol use, thereby creating different understandings regarding drinking. The boundaries they described around certain types of drinking providing a glimpse into the lay theory of drinking each person employs when they wish to drink in a particular way.

### **Vernaculars of Intent**

Informants brought up an assortment of motivations for alcohol use. As they put words around these desired outcomes, informants created definitions of what alcohol can do for them. As these understandings involve the active utilization of alcohol as a means to a desirable end, analysis in this section will focus on the notion of control.



### *Alcohol as Intoxicant*

While every informant spoke of experiencing alcohol-induced impairment, several listed the sensation of intoxication alone as a reason for drinking. Between the ages of 17 and 22, Bryant intoxication was described this as the goal each time he drank, which he called, “a daily thing.”

It was kind of like every time we would drink, I’d get drunk...because that’s kind of what we were aiming at, you know, at that age.

Hunter (26)

Jay never explicitly stated the experience of intoxication as a favorable outcome of drinking, but he did extol the chief benefit of everclear during our conversation. It was not taste.

The first semester, it was...it intensified. I...I recall even a couple of bad weeks when, you know, I used to drink like 5 days out of the week, but, you know, you can only do that for so long...well, some people can do it for a lifetime. I can only for...you know, for that...one semester, and...and...you know, just partying a lot, drinking a lot. At some point, I decided that it would be cheaper to buy everclear, cause...yeah...that was...and you can buy one bottle and don’t need that much of it, right?

Jay (22)

According to Jay, “I’m not going to, like, drink everclear to socialize with people.” He made this connection very clear when describing a drinking occasion that took place one night after work.

I would come out of work and it would be like 11:30, so I would have to catch up with everybody else, and that’s what everyone would take advantage, and, you know, like, “Take a shot,” and there were a couple of times when it definitely got

out of hand. One of them was everclear. It's known as the everclear night. I guess that's all we were drinking, everclear, and...the next morning, I had to [be somewhere in the morning].[...]It was supposed to be 9:30 until 12:30...3:30, and I woke up the next morning at 12:30, and I was like, "Oh, no." And I was just like still drunk, and...you know. It took me a while to get out of bed. The shower didn't...I turned the shower on and I think I started walking around looking for someone to drive me, because obviously I couldn't drive.

Jay (22)

Bruce was very clear about what his goal was, and what it was not, while describing drinking activities with his fraternity brothers.

Yeah, I guess you could say that buzzed feeling, and once I got there, I'd just stop. I never...see, that's the thing, like...I drink to enjoy myself. I don't drink to get drunk and get plastered, and not remember what happened the night before, and...all this other stupid stuff, like...that's no fun. You could have had the best time of your life last night, but if you don't remember it, you've only got some pictures...to, like...reconcile with, it's like...(knocks table)...it just takes the whole...fun out of it. You make no memories if you erase them all.

Bruce (22)

Bryant, who identified himself as an opiate addict, was an ardent proponent of this motivation. He said this was apparent the first time he drank alcohol.

I have a lot of memories of going to Europe. You know, and European culture is...even more accepting of alcohol than America, you know, I mean...we at least 21 to drink, you know. Over there, it might be 16, but nobody cares, you know. So, I remember drinking quite early...probably 10...9 or 10. I mean, not...obviously not all the time, but just, you know, with the family, maybe a glass of wine here or go into a hofbrau house or something, drinking a radler...like half...half beer, half lemonade. But, I remember from an early age...you know...that...I liked the feeling, you know. It wasn't just something to have with...with dinner. It had a pretty profound effect on me.

Bryant (26)

Bryant described the requirements of a situation for the physical effects of alcohol to be properly enjoyed.

I had friends that really preferred the alcohol, and they would drink, like, every day after school, whereas I got more into the marijuana, because I found with alcohol...now, granted, like, on a Friday or Saturday night, I don't want to smoke weed, because that's an everyday thing...because marijuana, once you've done it a few hundred times, it's just another buzz. You can smoke a joint and go to class...put some Visine in. I could smoke, put some cologne on, and eat dinner with my family...no one is the wiser...even [my father in law enforcement], you know. But, with alcohol, you know, you just become a sloppy mess, so...unless you just don't give a shit, or you have a good 8 hours that...you know, you don't have to be around any parents. Alcohol is just too hard to use like that. You know, especially for kids in school. Now, I mean, you hear about kids who, you know, drink...go to class drunk, but...it's probably just to be cool or something, you know. But, so, for me, you know, I enjoyed the alcohol. It was more of a treat that I...you do that on the weekends at a party when you could be away for a while, you know. Because like I said, I mean, every day monotony, that was just...marijuana. Now...but then I realized that...you know, I really didn't like mixing the two, because it's kind of different directions, but I realized that...if I didn't have a lot...instead of drinking like ten beers or ten shots to get really wasted, or smoking a lot of marijuana, I realized I could just smoke...I could just drink like 3 or 4 beers and then smoke a little bit of marijuana and then...the combined effect was greater than just the addition of both of them.

Bryant (26)

He attributed this overwhelming interest in the physical experience of intoxication to his personal brain chemistry.

I had a...cyst on my ear, and I was prescribed Percoset. It was a profound (snaps)...I mean, it blew my 14 year old brain. I mean, it was like...this is the secret to life. This is it. And, I know not everybody is like that. I mean, different people have different brain chemistry.[...]Some people, like me, it just (snaps) opened the door to a room that you just never wanted to leave. And...and, you know, alcohol does that for some people too, you know? I mean, I'd say...alcohol is more of a...fun type of thing. You know, with opiates, it's...the fun...it's not a go out and party kind of thing, you know. It brings the party to

you. You know, you can be fine just staring at your shoe all day.  
Bryant (26)

In this statement, Bryant described the solitary effects of opiate use as more beneficial than drinking and the social aspects that he considers to be a part of it.

Grant, who did not report the use of any other drugs, mentioned drinking out of a desire to get “tipsy.”

I...drunk to the point where I got tipsy, it was like during a time where me and my girlfriend at the time, you know, we weren't doing too hot, and...yeah, I just needed to just...experience...what it looks like to get tipsy and stuff like that. So, then I decided to do it, and...you know...we ended up breaking up, and...I think I turned away from alcohol because I didn't want to go back to having a hangover...to feeling so crappy...to feeling, like...I have to vomit, but nothing is coming out. I mean, that was probably just the worst feeling that I've ever had.

Grant (22)

This physical experience with intoxication was described as being different than those of Bryant. Grant described the desire to experience intoxication as a lure, but the side effects were said to be so unpleasant that he “turned away” from the use of alcohol from that point forward.

#### *Alcohol as Introduction*

Isaac revealed an understanding of alcohol as providing a venue for competition that allows for people to meet one another. In these instances, it seemed Isaac was primarily interested in meeting women.

The way I thought about alcohol was like a...like...you could impress women with it, if you were to drink, I don't know...more than them, sometimes. It's really...really...like, really superficial...how it goes. And...I don't know...it was a way to meet them, like...if you were drunk, then all of a sudden, like, it's okay for her...like, okay...I've seen women drink maybe one or two beers, or like...we...like...pour some shots, and then put half water in everyone else's but our own, just because we didn't want to share, and the girls will still act the same, no matter how much they drink. And things become acceptable that normally didn't, and since you're drunk too, it's okay...is what they say.

Isaac (21)

The notion of using alcohol to lower one's inhibitions and meet new people is one that came up repeatedly. It can be seen as one wishing to take control over his timidity or social caution and enabling himself to say just what he wants to say.

I could describe it with...I want to use Sigmund Freud's iceberg model, with the ego, superego, and the id. And my superego is usually huge, making me feel guilty and doing all these terrible things...plaguing me. And when I drink, it becomes itsy bitsy...and then, like, lots of subliminal stuff starts coming out. (Laughs) Stuff I didn't even know about myself starts coming out...and I feel more open...start, you know, to talk to anybody about anything.

Isaac (21)

Jay said that drinking helped him overcome shyness and make friends during his first semester of college.

First semester, intensified...most definitely. I was having fun, just meeting new people and it was just...it's what everybody was doing, and, you know...I'm trying to think of how I was really shy. I mean, I always like to say that's what helped me come out, but I never really was shy. It did...you know, it makes you more social, so it's always easier, especially if everybody else is doing it, then you join in, and...yeah, it was...it was just...definitely, for the first semester, it was...it intensified.

Jay (22)

Danny discussed alcohol less as lowering inhibitions and more as allowing interaction with females.

I've never ever really been good at meeting girls outside of the loop that I know, so like the girls that I would drink with in high school...were already part of our group. You get interested in them and then you would drink, and...or not...they go to the parties, and then...I guess...alcohol was always sort of liquid courage, even for girls that I knew. It made it a little bit easier to talk to them.

Danny (30)

The notion of "liquid courage" implies the belief that alcohol gave Danny control in a situation in which he felt otherwise powerless. Jorge also discussed the utility of alcohol in meeting members of the opposite sex, but not just for making it easier to speak to them. He frames it as creating a situation that provides access.

It would usually be, like, me and like three or four of my friends...and we would usually be going there to see...either some more of our friends, or a particular group of girls that we knew would be there. You know, it's kind of trying to put your...put yourself in, like, the optimal situation, I guess, to meet somebody...you know, meet the girl you want to meet, but you haven't talked to her at...in the school setting, necessarily. It might be easier to talk to her outside of school when you've had a beer in your or something.

Jorge (22)

More than just allowing the drinker to take control over his personal inhibitions, Jorge, when asked about the advantages of conversations when all parties are drinking, stated that engaging in conversation with a female who is also drinking results in the loosening of expectation placed by other the conversant. Rather than increase the drinker's control, this co-drinking is seen as creating less pressure to behave within a certain set of boundaries.

Acknowledging, like, where you are...like, your setting as well as your audience...who you're talking to...and trying to kind of fit the role, I guess. Because, you know, if you're talking to a girl, and you're drinking...and you're both drinking...then, you know, you can kind...you can be pretty loose and playful with each other, but if you're drinking and she's not, you kind of have to watch what you say, because it's a little...it's a little...I guess more strict, I guess...the...as to what they'll put up with.

Jorge (22)

Following a social disruption brought about by a female he had just stopped dating, Jay identified drinking as one of several activities he could do with other people. He credits alcohol as allowing him to make new friends and retake control over his social life.

I used to drink because I was just trying to make friends after, you know, the last girl I dated completely...destroyed my social life. So, I was just trying to make friends, and...my best friend, he had made a group of friends, and I sort of started hanging out with them. That was definitely more of, you know, occasional. We would do other things; we would play sports, you know.

Jay (22)

During Walter's first year of college in South America, he would often go out drinking and take the opportunity to meet other people in the bar. Alcohol was described as creating an enjoyable setting for these endeavors.

I'd be out every night, so...I'm also someone who just goes out, and like I meet new people, and I enjoy doing that, so...even if I was by myself, I'll go out and just meet people at the bar and hang out with them, and...I'm a social...sort of...social butterfly. So, yeah, it increased significantly at that point. So much that I ended up failing out.

Walter (27)

Throughout his narrative, Walter discussed having no social inhibition and using venues serving alcohol as a convenient place to either meet people or interact with people already knew. Walter indicated that he enjoyed these social opportunities so much that he let his school work slip.

### *Alcohol as a Social Boundary*

Much as alcohol can be described as a tool to overcome a perceived social boundary, it can also create the perception of a social boundary. Through the use of a rigid mindset similar to the one used to describe family socialization, several informants used an either/or approach while describing distinctions among social groups and the use of alcohol in the construction of these divisions. A popular phrase to describe the pressure to conform that resulted is “peer pressure.” Jay portrayed this as characterizing his early drinking.

I had to convince myself that I like the taste. I mean, now, I actually enjoy, you know, like beers...like I have...darker beers. Same thing with wine. It's like...I can...you know, tell the difference between two wines, and I like certain wines and some not, but back then, you know, it all tasted bad, right? And you have to kind of convince yourself, because...I guess it is sort of peer pressure, yeah. Even if it's not like, “Drink, drink, drink,” it's just like...just because everybody else is doing it, and...you know, you're so used to it.

Jay (22)

Jay later reinforced the idea that he drank because “everybody else was doing it,” but this time stated that he would not call it “peer pressure.”



When I started drinking, I started doing it not because, you know, like, I needed to have fun. I did because everyone was doing it and it was more of a social thing. I wouldn't call it peer pressure. I mean, you know, because, I...it's not like I got pressured into doing it. It was just a social thing, and...but I never drank heavily, like...I will be the one taking care of people, always, and it was just never fun for me to get...blackout drunk or anything like that. It didn't make much sense.

Jay (22)

Jay later clarifies his definition of peer pressure, indicating that it must be overt to be accurately given that label.

The thing is...after you turn 21, then that kind of birthday that I had, then I really didn't want to drink for a while, so...I had to put a...that slowed my drinking age abilities, somewhat. It was...that was peer pressure. I was...you know, it was my birthday, I had a five...a meeting at 8 in the morning in [another town], so I had to leave [town] at 5 in the morning, wake up at 4. At 11:30 the next, cause my birthday was, you know, the next day, so...my friends were like, "Come here, we'll have a beer at midnight and then you can go back to sleep." But we go to an apartment[...]and they wouldn't let me out until I took the shots, and I took 2 shots, sort of just followed them, wherever they took me, and things went downhill after that. Woke up the next morning in my bed, very dehydrated. Didn't make it to the meeting, if that's what you're wondering.

Jay (22)

Hunter echoed that a lot of his drinking between the ages of 17 and 22 was done in order to emulate others. He calls it "a peer thing."

I hung out with the...with the same group of people on a regular everyday basis...the same group of friends, the same group of older, I guess, peers. So, yeah, it was...usually drinking within the same...the same group of people. It may not have been the same exact people every time, but...a lot of...of the same friends and mutual acquaintances.[...]Where I came up, I was a member of a gang, so when I came here, it wasn't really prevalent like that...as far as like gangs and stuff go, but you still had like...small neighborhood cliques, just like groups of friends, and...I guess...it kind of serves the same purpose as a gang, it's just a difference of kind of how your neighborhood was constructed throughout time, and...but it still serves the same purpose as far as...the group of friends

were a support system...many were older, so it was a kind of a peer thing...you want to be like the older guys, so you kind of want to copy what they do, whether it's good or bad...if that's your...your example, that's what you're going to follow. So, it's just kind of the thing.

Hunter (26)

In describing alcohol use during his freshman year of college, Grant said, "it was basically go with the flow. Like, when people did it, I did it. Basically, peer pressure." He defined his idea of peer pressure further while describing a bad experience he had while drinking with some people during that same year.

It was some of my hallmates and my roommate and another friend of mine. And, you know, he had some liquor and I was just like...you know, they were drinking, I was like...okay, you know, why not? And so...I started drinking and...then they gave me some more, and they gave me some more, and...they were just, kind of like, laughing and...they loved me being drunk, and, you know, the...the mindset that comes to my mind is like, how come they can't treat me the same as if...even if I was sober? And so, that's where, I think, that peer pressure plays a role in why people continue to drink, because people typically like them when they're drunk or when they're under the influence, compared to then they're sober...and it's just, again, this culture that we buy into.

Grant (22)

Bryant describes how the pressure to drink from other people has had less of an effect on him as he ages.

When you get older, you know, you stop caring about what your friends think as much, you know, compared to high school. But yeah, now, it's like, I don't have anybody to impress. I don't give a shit, like...you can't...you know, I'm not going to have somebody be like, "Oh, drink a beer. Drink, pussy." No, like, fuck you. Like...I'm not going to...I'm 26. I'm not going to give into peer pressure, you know? If I don't want to go out, I'm not going to go out. If I don't want to drink, I'm not going to drink. I'm not going to do it just to impress you, you know?

Bryant (26)

### *Drinking and Dealing*

Several informants brought up the idea of drinking as providing a way to cope with difficult situations. Alcohol, in these instances, is considered to be an instrument to regain control that the informant feels has been lost. Isaac used the term “self-medication” to describe drinking in order to relieve, or at least forget about, pain from his athletic training sessions.

So...you know, you get bummed out, or, you know, you're hurting, or...you know, your muscles torn up, so...you go down...I've got a little local bar that I go to, and became a regular, you know, pretty much self-medicated. Like, any time there was a problem, you know, not that many people to talk to, so...just go down there to the bar, have a few, and then come home, fall asleep. (Laughs) So pitiful.  
Isaac (21)

Looking back at his fluctuations in drug use, Bryant said that, “when I’ve stopped using opiates...I usually fall back on alcohol.” He continued to say that he enjoyed drinking as a teenager when he was able to “be away for a while.”

So, for me, you know, I enjoyed the alcohol. It was more of a treat that I...you do that on the weekends at a party when you could be away for a while, you know.[...]I still love alcohol. I mean...it's kind of rediscovering it, you know, because I don't do it that much anymore. But, I mean, back then...and now, you know, it's just this loosening up. You know, just this feeling that...you know...that it's just like...there's a party, you know, you could just be hanging out with a couple of your...stupid friends, but it just makes, you know, the monotony that much, you know, easier to bear. That's why I really liked opiates, because that's a whole other level. I mean, alcohol makes you want to be social, but it breaks up the monotony, because, you know, anything seems funnier, and, you know, music sounds better, food tastes better, but you still kind of want to be social.

Bryant (26)

Bryant reported that many opiate addicts, himself included, turn to alcohol when they are unable to acquire their drug of choice. Drinking, in this instance, is to recapture some control over one's mental state lost due to the difficulty obtaining opiates. It is framed as a palliative second choice.

I always joke that, you know, alcohol is like an opiate addict's best friend, because I know a lot of people...a lot of opiate addicts, or opioid abusers that...when they ran out for whatever reason, they didn't have enough money or their connect ran out, they would...almost everyone I knew, myself included, would fall back on alcohol...and not just out of boredom or out of...you know, especially with opiates. It's not like...like...you know, I just want to get screwed up on something, but something about the alcohol is sort of comforting...for...you know...it almost like, it tickles...even though I know it doesn't tickle the opioid receptors. It's almost like it's a similar kind of effect.

Bryant (26)

Bryant describes alcohol as making periods of withdrawal from opiates a little more tolerable. He continued this when he was asked to personify his relationship with alcohol.

My personal relationship with alcohol would just be, like...an ex-girlfriend that...that I had an unhealthy relationship with that I still screw every now and then, as a last resort. Yeah. That's how I would personify it. For me, personally. I don't think that...alcohol, in general...for most people, it's not like that. But, yeah, for me...just because of my unique situation, yeah...it's just like an old girlfriend, or an old friend, that...that every once in a while I might fall back on.

Bryant (26)

Danny referred to alcohol use as a weekend "escape," framed as a spiritual rehabilitation on weekends after a week of hard work. In this case, what is sought after is the loss of control.

I worked hard, and I...you know...during the week, and I partied hard on the weekends, so maybe it was more of a...an escape, not from...not because I had something bad going on, but it was an escape. A good type of escape to...just, you know, take it easy and not work so hard, after I had been working so hard during the week. I don't want to use escape in the negative. I think a lot of people use the word "escape" when it comes to alcohol in a negative way, well in a bad way. Maybe not a negative way, but in a bad way to say that...escape from reality, because they have a lot of personal problems going on, and that's not the case with me, anyway. In any case, it's not the case with me.

Danny (30)

Jay also discussed the fact that drinking alcohol can, at times, help a person relax.

It's something that I do because I enjoy doing it, not because I have to do it, not because I need to...socialize. It's not something that I have to do to fit in the environment that I...that I am at that moment, or...you know. It's...I just do it because I like the taste, or...you know...because, sometimes it does help you relax. Sometimes.

Jay (22)

Jay hinted at the idea that alcohol has not been a reliable partner in his attempts to relax.

Grant also discussed the unreliability of alcohol when describing his most recent use of it as a coping mechanism. Dealing with "a lot of things...combined," Grant embarked on what he described as his most unpleasant drinking experience.

I've never drunk so much to the point where I had no idea what was going on. I would say that the most I ever drank was to the point where I was tipsy and had a sense of what I was doing, and then next day...it was like the worst day of my life. Like, basically the toilet was my best friend, so...so that was my one experience to the point where, like, I would say I got a hangover the next day.[...]It was like during a time where me and my girlfriend at the time, you know, we weren't doing too hot, and...yeah, I just needed to just...experience...what it looks like to get tipsy and stuff like that. So, then I decided to do it.

Grant (22)

Alcohol did not provide Grant with the effect that he was seeking. It was described as only adding physical discomfort to his emotional distress. Rather than describing alcohol as an instrument of control, Grant said that he found what he was looking for through the power of God.

I would say...it was one of the things that...[long pause]...really pointed me towards God. Because my identity is grounded in my faith...you know, in my creator. You know being a child of God. That's my true identity. And so...you know, I believe that, you know, God puts us through different trials, different struggles, you know...and that's when we hit rock bottoms...to show us that, aside from everything, when we lose everything, stripped of everything, the only thing we have is him. And so, he is the comfort that we need to be able to...escape from these things that...we're enslaved in...and one of them is alcohol. Yeah, I've heard...I've known of...you know, college students who used to drink like no other, and these are my dear friends, and God was the one that has saved them from that. Like, I know of a lot of...you know...of my close friends who loved alcohol. You know, because of God's love that...he displays to them, they realized that God is so much bigger than alcohol. And so...that's why I think that...the role that alcohol played...it showed...it shows me how...yeah, it's a form of deception, and...yeah, it's a big distraction to a lot of people, you know. And I know that...it...brings more harm than comfort to other people. Because that comfort is temporary, but that harm...will always be there. Because it's slowly negatively affecting your health.

Grant (22)

Both Jay and Grant describe the unreliability of alcohol as providing an effective way to cope with hectic or unpleasant periods of time. This endows alcohol with agency and acknowledges the volatility that often results from interactions with it. Actors speak of deciding to use alcohol to exercise control over their situation, but recognize that sometimes alcohol seizes control on its own.

### *Drinking for Flavor*

A number of informants attribute some or all of their drinking at the time of the interview to an appreciation of the flavor of some alcoholic beverages. It demonstrates complete control over the time, place, and they type of substance used. While describing his recent experience with social drinking, Walter was clear to say that flavor is the reason alcohol is involved at all. Otherwise, he indicated that he would get the same social benefit from gathering at a coffee shop.

I happen to like beer. You know, I happen to like the taste. The things that I drink, I happen to like the taste. So I don't think it's like I drink with the intention to get drunk, I drink because I enjoy the taste. Maybe at one point it wasn't like that, but...I think there's something very, very cool about sitting around with your friends having a couple of drinks and just talking. Maybe that's my coffee shop sort of thing, you know? I enjoy, you know, me, you and my friend... 'Hey, let's go grab a beer and just talk about things and chill out.'

Walter (27)

Walter stated that his appreciation for the flavor was learned while “having a couple of drinks and just talking.”

It's a different taste from when you go from drinking soda and water, you know, when you're younger, but you don't think you'll grow a...like for it. I like it.

Walter (27)

Jay also said that he did not like the taste of beer or wine when he first started drinking, but had to “convince” himself that he did.

I mean, it was...at first, it was kind of like I had to convince myself that I like the taste. I mean, now, I actually enjoy, you know, like beers...like I have...darker beers. Same thing with wine. It's like...I can...you know, tell the difference

between two wines, and I like certain wines and some not, but back then, you know, it all tasted bad, right? And you have to kind of convince yourself, because...I guess it is sort of peer pressure, yeah. Even if it's not like, "Drink, drink, drink," it's just like...just because everybody else is doing it, and...you know, you're so used to it.

Jay (22)

This relatively newfound appreciation for the taste of certain types of alcohol is described as crucial part of Jay's current style of drinking.

I'm usually very responsible, I mean...I guess that...I like...I like being buzzed. I like having fun. I like the taste of, you know, what I drink, but just getting blacked out and to the point that, you know, it's just embarrassing and I don't enjoy that anymore.

Jay (22)

When asked to describe a drinking occasion he might find himself in at the present, Emmanuel shared his appreciation for drinking with a meal.

Yeah. It's usually, like, with a meal. Most often. I drink wine with dinner, sometimes. Or, sometimes I'll drink a beer, like one beer at night when I come home, because I...my roommate buys beers, different kinds of beers, like designer beer or microbrew or something like...whatever it's called...and...so, sometimes, I'll just have one of those, just because it's there. Some of them are pretty good.

Emmanuel (30)

Emmanuel also noted that he sometimes drinks "good" liquor apart from a meal due to the flavor.

And...well...definitely just drinking for flavor, just...you know...just to have a good drink. Like...every once in a while, too, I drink liquor. Like, I keep...I like really good scotch. I usually have a good...some good bottle of scotch that I'll have a drink of sometimes.

Emmanuel (30)



Unlike Walter, Emmanuel did not claim this appreciation had to be completely learned, but he does indicate that it has become more of a factor in his decisions to drink.

It's always been about flavor to some extent, especially like...like I've drank...I got introduced to different kinds of liquor pretty young, and some of them were just...good. I mean, they just taste good...and...but, yeah, I'd say it became more at this point about the flavor, yeah...increasingly about the flavor.[...] Particularly wine. I mean, that's kind of the...usually, if I'm drinking with a meal, it's wine. Almost always.

Emmanuel (30)

Emmanuel attributes some of the increased importance of flavor to having access to higher quality forms of alcohol.

I drink beer some, but that's even...when I was younger, I pretty much strictly drank liquor. I never really liked beer when I was younger, and...that probably had a lot to do with people drinking bad, cheap beer. Because some beer is pretty good. Like, I'll drink beers now...different beers that have good...different kinds of flavors or whatever, but I don't like, like, Miller is just nasty. I don't drink any kind of beer like that. But yeah, I started...when I started drinking, it was liquor...is what I drank, and then...more recently, I drink beer some...and wine.

Emmanuel (30)

Like Emmanuel, Isaac shared a fondness for the taste of certain types of alcohol with a meal.

I don't really go to downtown as much, where there's a bunch of people, I just go to, like, small ones. It's more...now, my drinking is more, like...I don't really like drinking Bud Light, or things like that. I only drink, like, imports or, like, really high quality, you know, ones that are like...a little bit more expensive, but I want to be able to...like...taste the beer. I want to...I don't want the beer to make me feel sick. I want it to...be, like, a nice beer. Maybe with some food, you know, like some fish tacos, or something, like a really nice, fresh...sandwich or something...some stuff like that.

Isaac (21)

Isaac opined that the best part about drinking in general is the flavor, particularly different types of “well-crafted” beers.

For me, [the best part about drinking alcohol] would be drinking new beers...new types...just different ones...it’s become more of, like, like, oh this beer is well-crafted, like, knowing that someone has, like, took super care in, you know, getting specific types of whatever they used to make it. This one is different from this one. This wine is different from this beer, and this wine...so, just like...kind of...the new...just that it’s new.

Isaac (21)

### **Self-controlled Drinking**

Focus on the vernaculars of intent highlights drinking as an act done for control.

Jorge identified the sudden increase in control over his own behavior during his first year in college as leading to a substantial increase in alcohol consumption.

I didn’t do very well my first semester of college, because I had some early morning classes, and I would probably be drinking three or four nights a week.[...] I’d say I drank pretty heavily my freshman year of college, just, you know, the freedom of being away from your parents, and like, you know, having to make decisions for yourself of whether to go to class or not to go to class, but...you know, after a while...you know, especially after that first semester.

Jorge (22)

Walter echoed this sentiment.

I wasn’t a good student then, what was I going to do in [the country where I attended college] without my parents, you know? Easily, you know, I was...18 at the time. I can drink there legally, so...yeah. So then there was a significant increase, because every night, I would party. Wouldn’t go to class, but...yeah.

Walter (27)

In addition to attributing an increase in drinking to an increase in control, Bruce stated that drinking in a way that is not “stupid” requires a level of self-control that must be learned.

This is one of the most embarrassing things, I think...my freshman year...like, and I...I should have known better, but...I let my hallmate get to me and...I really didn't change, like, you know...I...I...I guess you would say I drank more, because...the opportunity is there, and it's freshman year, and you're not around your parents. But when I did drink, I didn't act a fool or anything, but I did act a fool one time, or got too ahead of myself when...my hallmate decided to challenge me to see who could drink more, and I was an idiot, and I don't know why I did it, but...that's when I first got my drinking ticket.[...]I guess I drank most weekends...and, but that's about it, but...when I did drink, I didn't act like...I was like...I was alright. I didn't do anything stupid, because...from previous experience, like, I knew how I felt to have alcohol in my system.

Bruce (22)

Jorge equated self-control with both responsibility and social drinking while describing his father giving him his first beer.

I can remember I was 13 when my dad gave me my first beer, and it was after...or, no...I guess it was 15, but what...he had moved out of Wilmington, and he kind of was...I guess he was trying to be “cool dad,” but we were...we were at this like...yacht club or beach club, whatever, and just gave me a...like, I think it was like a Miller in a foam cup, and he said, “Just sip on this.” You know, kind of trying to...I guess, break you into manhood, because like, I mean, he was a fraternity guy, so...I don't know if he...you know, I don't think he was trying to turn me into an alcoholic, but he was just, kind of...letting me experience that before I experience it on my own, you know. Which, I mean, I think I had at that point, obviously, but...as far as he was concerned, he was trying to help culture me into...socially drinking.[...]It's like, I'd rather them do it here when I'm watching than not, because I mean, it's kind of like...you know, you don't want to...you know, you hope your kids aren't, like, you know, having sex in high school, but, you know, you can't be there for them, so you can just kind of tell them about sex, the birds and the bees, and then, you know, let them make that decision. So...so, I guess, him showing me responsibility through that...you

know, telling me to sip on it.

Jorge (22)

Grant linked negative consequences of drinking with a lack of self-control.

You know, many people don't understand the consequences when they drink. They are just in the moment, and that's why they love it, just because they love the feeling of it. And I know there are people who like...the taste of it, but if you don't develop a self-control to be able to handle...the element of liquor, then you're just going to fall into drunkenness.

Grant (22)

The above statements describe the relationship between alcohol and a sense of control as being delicate. Upon receiving the freedom to choose their own behavior, many report an increase in alcohol consumption. Several informants also report that control is also necessary to stop drinking at a certain point. Different intents result in a corresponding definition of successful alcohol to achieve the desired ends. It can be a struggle for people to maintain a relationship with alcohol where alcohol is reliably relegated to a subservient role. The next section describes a collection of approaches to drinking that informants drew boundaries around and that may be selected from in an attempt to best achieve the desired outcome.

## **Vernaculars of Strategy**

### *Social Drinking*

A common way people categorized drinking was as "social drinking." At its most basic level, social drinking was described just as drinking with other people.

From then, I would say, like, my first...you know, like...I guess when I got into high school, freshman year, I went to a couple...parties, that were my first, kind of, social drinking experiences. Like, you know, that was, like, you know, us trying alcohol, but actually like drinking and socially interacting at the same time. That's...I guess, high school is when that first happened for me.

Jorge (22)

Other descriptions of social drinking did not only involve drinking with others, but drinking in a socially acceptable way. Danny refers to mainstream social acceptance as responsibility.

My grandfather was...sort of served as my...I guess, father figure growing up, and I would often...even when I was younger, before I actually started drinking myself, he was a member of the Moose Lodge, and he would always take me to...they would have dances every month. They would have a New Year's dance, a Christmas dance, Halloween dance, stuff like that, and he'd always take me to those, and there was always drinking going on around. So, I guess I was exposed to it much younger than I ever was actually...taking part in it, and...I guess I never thought about that before, but I guess that would play into a...an...more accepting of that kind of behavior. So, he really never sent any negative messages. I was always around him when he was drinking, so...socially. So, I don't know...I guess that was...he never discouraged it, but I guess he...taught me more responsibility, because if he'd drink and my grand...you know, then my grandmother wouldn't and she would drive. If my grandmother would drink then my grandfather wouldn't and he would drive, so...I guess I learned...if anything, I learned responsibility when it comes to it.

Danny (30)

He echoed this same sentiment while describing his own drinking later in our discussion.

I always drank when I was around friends in a social setting. Very rarely around strangers. So, it was relatively, you know, safe, responsible in drinking, whether or not it was past the point of...you know...being a normal amount of alcohol to drink. I didn't...you know...I guess, I wish I'd known my limits a little bit more.

Danny (30)

Hunter included additional components in his description of social drinking.

Now...it doesn't really do anything. I mean, you know, of course, if you drink a lot, you're going to get drunk, but...I mean, it's more of a...a social...you know, thing...kind of like people socially drink, socially smoke. Same thing like that. I socially drink. I don't drink on my own. Very, very rarely will I have a drink by myself, and if I do, it's like one, do you know what I mean? And it's just...maybe I'm...maybe I just can't go to sleep or something like that, so I might have, like, a little bit of alcohol on some ice, you know, to try to go to sleep or something like that. But, I mean, it doesn't really do anything for me. I don't get excited about...going to go drink. I mean, I have...I have 4 bottles of liquor that have been sitting in my house for probably 3 months, you know. 2 of them ain't even opened...and the 2 that are opened are only missing like this much [indicates about an inch with his fingers] alcohol, you know. So, it's not really a big deal. It doesn't do much for me anymore. It's not...like I said, I mean, it's just something that comes up, like, when we have a celebration. Maybe somebody's birthday or a holiday or something like that. It's not really something that I look forward to...in a big regard. Like, even, like, St. Patrick's Day, I don't care, you know. I'm not a huge drinker, so...it doesn't really do anything for me. I don't get super excited about it.

Hunter (26)

Hunter creates a series of parameters around the idea of social drinking here by describing what it is not. For one thing, social drinking is referred to as an alternative to drinking to intoxication. It is also presented as something that is not done alone. This type of drinking is discussed as being unremarkable. It just happens.

Jorge went into a little more detail about what he thinks makes social drinking social in nature.

I don't, like...I can't like kill a case or anything, but I'm just...I feel like I'm an average...you know, social drinker...kind of like how my dad was, as far as drinking for...maybe not social acceptance, but just...you know...people are more comfortable if I have a beer in my hand than if I'm standing there in the corner like this...you know, it's just...filling the role of being at a party, which,

you know, in a fraternity, you know, whether you want to be there or not, you're kind of...at least I feel like you're obligated to represent the fraternity.

Jorge (22)

Like Hunter, Jorge indicated intoxication is antithetical to social drinking. He mentioned that this kind of drinking is meant to make others more comfortable to speak to him, thereby fulfilling an obligation to his social group. This is an idea he explored further.

If you have a drink...then, like, you can have a conversation with somebody that you've never talked to before or...I feel like...easier if you've...if you're both, like, on that level of drinking. Like, if I'm drinking and you're not, then...that's a separation...and, like, you know, we wouldn't have the same conversation as if we're both drinking. Because it's like...we're putting ourselves on the same level.

Jorge (22)

### *Staged Drinking*

Several informants noted that just the appearance of drinking carried some social value, but that this same impression could be instilled while limiting the physical effects. Emmanuel discusses this within the context of his friends in the entertainment industry.

I know people who...will fake drinking. Like, I've known multiple people that, like, will fill vodka bottles up with water kind of stuff and make a...you know, more or less make a display of themselves, but they're not really doing it.[...] DJs, people in bands...entertainers...not just like random people at a...club or a bar, but...yeah, definitely...like, I know one guy in particular that was in a band that I knew...pretty good band and stuff, but he...theatrics, you know. I mean, he would like drink on stage, but he was never really drinking. It would be, like, you know, a Jim Beam bottle with diluted Coca-Cola in it to look like whatever...you know, he may take the bottle and...pour 3/4<sup>th</sup> of it out and then put something in that's the same color, and...something like that.[...] Almost the same as...I know people in bands that, you know, with the busting the guitars thing, you can...put wooden pins in the guitar instead of screws, and you can break the guitar without breaking the guitar. It's sort of the same thing...like, staged...staged drinking.

Emmanuel (30)

While Emmanuel describes this as occurring on a literal stage, this type of behavior is discussed by other informants as having utility on a personal level rather than just a professional one.

Definitely, if you're in a surrounding where...everyone is drinking and everyone has a drink in their hand, and...you're the only one that's not, and they're going to be like, oh, why aren't you drinking? So, just to avoid that question, you just like...whether it's empty, or like if it's a can...whether it's empty or not, you just hold on to it. So, like, people don't, like, approach you about it, and just like...you know.

Bruce (22)

Whereas the staged drinking Emmanuel was describing within the context of artistic performing, Bruce discussed a similar behavior as not to appear unusual. To use the language of Jorge, Bruce admitted to carrying empty alcohol containers as not to create separation between himself and others. Jay described modifying his behavior with a similar goal in mind.

I'm the kind of person that pretends to be more intoxicated than they actually are, just so people will not, you know, make him drink more, and...and...so it was always like the...I wouldn't drink as much as everybody else. I...my freshman year of high school, actually, I was in a car accident. So, I had some trouble...and then...two years later, I had surgery, so...I...like...chugging beers is something that actually causes a lot of discomfort for me, so I don't do it, and...that's usually how kids, you know, get...hammered, I guess...just drinking fast, and I don't enjoy drinking fast, so I don't and never did it.

Jay (22)



### *College Drinking*

Several informants described staged drinking as an alternate way to fulfill expectations they perceived others present to hold. Several informants created a construct of college drinking to describe an expected style of drinking by those in college. The use of alcohol was considered by many informants as an unavoidable part of college.

Interviewer: So, was there a lot of drinking, I guess, in your apartment [at college], or with your friends at [college]?

Walter: Not a ton, but there was. I mean, it was still college, so it existed. It was there. We did...we drank quite often, but again, because there's not a ton to get into, it was really just more...friends sit around at the house and have a couple of beers, you know? Yeah, there were parties, and occasional drunken nights.

Walter (27)

Jay indicated that drinking to the point when one can no longer walk is more common in college than in the "real world."

Yesterday, my...the girl that I'm dating now, who is in a sorority, went on a bar crawl with the seniors in the sorority, and she doesn't really drink that much, and I don't really understand, like, but it was just drinking, and drinking, and drinking, and drinking, and she didn't drink that much...she didn't call me to pick her up, but, you know, her friends, just kept drinking, drinking to the point that, I mean, you cannot even walk, and...that's...I consider that different than, I mean...I don't know if it's the environment, you feel like you can do that and...and be safe, which is not true at all, or, you know, it's...it's that, just the fact that you are surrounded by people like you, your age, and...seniority (?), but...I don't think...most people...a lot of people still, do, but, you know, people in the real world usually do that, at least not if they're smart. But it's more common in college scenarios.

Jay (22)

Walter indicated that he was aware of this sort of behavior and described an increase in drinking during his senior year of high school as partially resulting from what he expected alcohol use to be like in college.

And then as time goes on, you get older, you get a car, it's easier to move around, you know. Maybe it increases, I would say, my senior year, where you just think you're grown because you're going to go to college and those are the kinds of things you will be doing, so you might as well...do them now. Might as well, I mean, it was a good time, you know...some nights better than others. There's always someone who just drank way too much, and...God, come on, dude...I didn't come out to take care of you.

Walter (27)

When asked to talk about the point in college when he began drinking less and focused on his studies, Jay contrasted college drinking with a drinking style that allows someone to focus on schoolwork.

It wasn't...it was definitely not college drinking. It was the occasional...they were having a party, I would go there and have two beers, or, you know, have like one mixed drink and some other...not even, you know...I don't really give into, like, taking shots because people tell me to, or...it's just not fun for me anymore. If I...if I drink, it's because it's something that I want to do or enjoy it, or, you know, have a beer with dinner, or...I mean, once in a while...like my birthday a couple of weeks ago, I, you know, had several beers, but it's just not fun. It's just not fun to...to me, another reason for...for that, it's because...I guess, I see how alcohol can change people and turn them into, just, you know, people that are nothing like we thought they were. I think of, you know, specifically, my brother-in-law, who I, you know, respect for many reasons, and then I've seen him, you know, intoxicated to the extent that it's just...it's just scary, and...and embarrassing, and, you know, someone you cannot recognize. My best friend, like I said, when he used to drink, he would drink to the point that...it was just like...stupid. Like, at some point, he threw a...he threw a bottle through our friend's house window and, you know, and then...sort of ran away. I was left there with dealing with...so not a lot of concern for other people, and that really bothered me, so I guess whenever something like that happened, and...you know...whenever it's just like me, you know, when I would drink like that, I

would think about that and be like, hey, that's not really who I want to be, so...or I don't want people to think of me that way, or...you know...of I can't judge them if I do it myself. Maybe it was more like...but, yeah. So...a combination of experiences and it just didn't make sense.

Jay (22)

In this explanation, Jay indicated that college drinking implies intoxication and makes people act in a way that does not reflect the way people expect them to act when sober. He was especially troubled about the lack of concern for other people.

Grant indicated that people would treat him differently when he was adhering to the perceived norm of college drinking than when he was not drinking.

It was some...residents on my hall...it was some of my hallmates and my roommate and another friend of mine. And, you know, he had some liquor and I was just like...you know, they were drinking, I was like...okay, you know, why not? And so...I started drinking and...then they gave me some more, and they gave me some more, and...they were just, kind of like, laughing and...they loved me being drunk, and, you know, the...the mindset that comes to my mind is like, how come they can't treat me the same as if...even if I was sober? And so, that's where, I think, that peer pressure plays a role in why people continue to drink, because people typically like them when they're drunk or when they're under the influence, compared to then they're sober...and it's just, again, this culture that we buy into.

Grant (22)

This difference was said to be rooted in the expectation for students to drink in college.

Interviewer: So, you felt like they treated you differently when you were drinking versus when you were not drinking?

Grant: Yeah.

Interviewer: Can you describe this difference for me?

Grant: Just kind of like...more lively, like, "Oh, hey, man. [Grant] is drinking for the first time. Man! It's just like another step in his life!" So, this is another, like, oh man, you experienced something else in college. It's like, you know how when you come into college...kind of like a checklist...it's like, okay, I'm going to go to the club, I'm going to get drunk...it's like, that was just...one of the things that I was supposed to do as a freshman in college.

Grant (22)

Hunter reported that more than college student drinking is made up of more than just a drinking style, but the types of alcohol consumed as well.

If you go out with...with...older, more professional type of people, they might tend to drink wine. You go out with a younger group of college kids, they might tend to drink beer and low-grade alcohol. You know, it changes with the group.

Hunter (26)

While talking about a ticket he received from the local police department for underage consumption of alcohol, Bruce shared his understanding that getting trouble for things like this is part of the college experience.

A drinking ticket shouldn't affect that much. I mean, people go to college and get in trouble, so...and what did affect me, though, was this stupid, like, college...university stuff that they made me do. Like, I had to go to counseling and take like an online EDU class, and...like...it was like my first offense, and like, I was put on probation, and I heard, like, other students...they would get, like, the first offense and they would get a slap on the hand. But for me, apparently, I...so when they breathalyzer-ed me, I was like...I blew really high, so the Dean of Students...if you know who that is...he was like...he just said, okay, you're on probation.

Bruce (22)

Isaac highlighted a distinction between college, where doing “stupid stuff” is not a problem, versus back at home, where he had to take care to behave in a way his family would approve of.

Like, you have to...you have to control yourself. If you drink...you go sit down somewhere. You don't...you know...whereas in the college scene, it makes it okay to act crazy and do stupid stuff and...like...but, at home, there is none of that. If you drink, like, you have to control yourself.

Isaac (21)

More than just the expectation of drinking in college, Jorge described that he perceives his mother's drinking in college as different than partying “college-way.”

In her social status or her, like, social setting, she just...you know, she doesn't have a lot of friends that drink, and like, it's just not...I don't know. She was real busy in college, so I don't feel like she like partied college-way, like some people do, and...she's real goal-oriented, so she's always, like, stressing about work and stuff, you know. I guess her alcohol would be coffee. She'll drink like two cups in the morning, and...you know, have some shakes if she goes a day without, you know, just kind of...stuff like that. But she's...she's pretty straight-edge as far as, like, you know...she doesn't smoke or...she really doesn't like smoking.

Jorge (22)

By describing how he thought his mother drank in college, Jorge contrasts the idea of partying “college-way” with being busy and goal-oriented. He uses the adjective “straight-edge” as an antonym of sorts.

Danny said that he felt like “partying was over with” when he left college. He continues that “obviously” he was not watching how much he drank as a college student.

I had minor liver damage when I graduated [from college]. The good thing about that is...your liver can heal itself, and...I don't think that's what necessarily

stopped me from drinking such a heavy amount, because it didn't scare me I think as much as maybe it would some people, when you hear you have liver damage...and my liver function became normal after that. I just think of the time I was...starting a career where...a career that's actually known for alcoholism, surprisingly, but...I just was out of college, you know, felt like partying was over with at the time, so I stopped drinking as much. It had nothing to do with finding I had liver damage.[...]It's just my doctor told me, like, it'll heal itself, you've just got to watch how much you drink and, obviously, in college, I wasn't doing that.

Danny (30)

While describing his post-college employment, Danny stated that he considered drinking to be something college students are “supposed” to do.

I was in a career, starting a career, and...I worked quite a bit, you know, [law enforcement] work...work 12 hour shifts, you know, 3 days in a row, 12 hour shifts. You don't get a lot of sleep. You don't get a lot of time...I mean, you get time off, but...what little time I got off, the couple of days of 3 days in a row that I would get off, was more...those would be during the week, occasionally be on the weekends...it's more getting stuff done that needed to get done than...you can't do when you're working 3 12 hour shifts in a row, and...I just stopped drinking as much. I'm not saying the partying was over, or anything like that, but, you know...it's just...college. I guess maybe my perception of college was, you know, you're supposed to drink and...have a good time.

Danny (30)

Bryant took a very different approach to talk about the idea of college drinking and shared what he knew about college drinking from researching the subject.

You know, I'll always be an addict, but I might, you know, be able to recover, but my brain will still be...if it's ever introduced to a substance, I'll still go off the deep end. But, I have seen some research showing...with college kids...they showed this scale of alcohol abuse...and then...it goes up and up and up, but...and of course, some people continue on and on past college and they become full-blown alcoholics for the rest of their life. But, there is an alarmingly high, a counter-intuitively high amount of...of people that drink like alcoholics up until college, and then stop after college, which would show that it's just a lifestyle thing, and it's a party thing, you know. So...everybody's different. I

mean, that's the human condition. I mean, that's why sociology...you know, it's a science of probability, you know, because...it's not like biology. It's not a definite thing, you know. It's not like physics. It's not like a definite thing, because it's a human variable and we're all different.

Bryant (26)

In describing his time as a community college student, Walter indicated that this belief in college drinking is predicated on people in certain ages and in certain academic environments.

I still didn't hang out...it was a community college, so, I don't know, those tend to be a little bit...not that I didn't meet people there, but those tend to be a little bit more...little older. You go in, you take class, you leave.

Walter (27)

Bruce suggested that the drinking style people adopt in college is highly related to whether they were "taught" how to drink or not.

The way I got brought up was alcohol is...with my family, and...that's why I feel like...like, a lot of the students here, like, their families prohibit them from drinking until they're 21, or they don't do it...so when they turn 21 and they're in college, they drink and they get plastered, and...they, like, do stupid stuff. But for me, I was taught to learn how to drink, so like, I would drink with my family, and when they would say...oh, like, alright, you've had a little bit too much of...they'll stop me. And, coming from your family, you'll listen to them.[...]I learned my tolerance and how to control myself when I drank. So, when I came here to college, and I saw...these kids just like...drinking like idiots...it's like, they do stupid stuff. It's like, what are you doing? It's like, why can't you just...enjoy your drink? But, they like drink to get drunk, but...contrary to where...I was...brought up to drink to enjoy, and you know, to socialize.

Bruce (22)

### *Heavy Drinking*

A constant in the construction of “college drinking” seems to be the ingestion of a large amount of alcohol. Many informants chose to categorize this as “heavy drinking.” Hunter, in particular, described a particular style of drinking in this way when asked to elaborate on the distinction he drew between everyday drinking and party drinking.

You know, if you’re drinking like you’re at a party, but it’s just kind of the middle of the day, that wasn’t really seen as, you know, I guess normal. But if you drank heavy when you go out, that’s completely acceptable and fine.

Hunter (26)

With this statement, Hunter described heavy drinking as “acceptable and fine” for drinking at a party, but that it is abnormal to drink in this manner in the middle of the day. Isaac also links heavy drinking with drinking large quantities of alcohol and letting loose, much as one would do at a party.

Definitely heavy...definitely heavy. Yep. I think...I think on the summers...those...like, the college summers, I really let loose and drink a lot...drink a lot.

Isaac (21)

Use of the phrase “let loose” is an interesting component to Isaac’s definition of heavy drinking, as it paints a picture of heavy drinking as being free from restraint. Later in our conversation, when asked to describe the difference in frame of mind created by alcohol use, Isaac used material from his coursework to make his point.

I could describe it with...I want to use Sigmund Freud’s Iceberg Model, with the ego, superego, and the id. And my superego is usually huge, making me feel



guilty and doing all these terrible things...plaguing me. And when I drink, it becomes itsy bitsy...and then, like, lots of subliminal stuff starts coming out. (Laughs) Stuff I didn't even know about myself starts coming out...and I feel more open...start, you know, to talk to anybody about anything.

Isaac (21)

Throughout Isaac's narrative, he brings up the issue of control. This came up near the beginning of our conversation, while talking about his father.

My father, he only had like really one discussion with me about alcohol, and he just told me about...how...when he would drink, he hated the feeling of being weighed down, and how it made him feel vulnerable, so...I mean, he really left it up to me. But...he had, like...he made it sound kind of...you know...like, not so good.

Isaac (21)

Together, these segments of the conversation indicate that Isaac considers "heavy drinking" to consist of relinquishing control over himself and his behavior while drinking a large amount of alcohol.

Danny indicated that he did not go to many parties while attending college close to home, but describes his drinking as "heavy" once he transferred to a school farther away. At the first school, Danny described his drinking as only occurring at fraternity parties.

I would meet other people, and we would go to different parties around, I don't know if...you know...houses people have around campus and whatnot that would have parties. We would go to those, I guess, specifically fraternity. That was the majority of what I remember from what I was here, going to fraternity parties.

Danny (30)

Once he moved to his second college, drinking was described as also occurring in apartments with friends.

I've always really been more of a...kind of a studious person, so...I mean, I would go to parties and whatnot, and...I think that first year of college, I...even though I wasn't that far away from home.[...]I went home a lot, so I didn't stay during the weekends to go to a lot of the parties like some people did. So, I guess, the really drinking...heavy drinking happened when I transferred to [another college].[...]I think it was...a little bit more...available, there. And maybe it is because I stayed, but, you know, it wasn't just fraternity parties or anything like that. They were just...I mean, people just had parties and you just listened around and showed up. But, really, I would...we really drank a lot around...the funny thing about it is, I think, one consistent thing throughout my drinking over the years is that I've drank with pretty much the same people in the same setting. We would typically...all of us had apartments.

Danny (30)

In both instances, alcohol use was described as being relegated to the weekends. Being near campus all week at the second school is linked with an increased frequency of drinking. Danny also talked about drinking a large amount at each particular drinking session. He made it clear that flavor was not considered to be a positive part of drinking.

I would try to always have my work done by the weekends, so that when we got together and had, you know, parties, and drank and stuff on the weekends, that I could do whatever I...you know...I can get drunk and not have to worry about being hung over the next day and not wanting to do schoolwork, so typically Fridays through Sundays, you know, we would drink a lot, and I just...I worked hard, so I guess I decided I would party hard too.[...]I guess I just would drink and drink and...it would taste bad at the start and then it...you know, you don't really care much after you get intoxicated, so...I'd just keep on drinking, and a lot times, people...a lot of times, my friends would...would cut me off, I guess. But, I had a pretty high tolerance for it, so...I don't know if it was a natural tolerance, or...size, or whatnot.

Danny (30)

Danny admitted that once he starts to drink, he has a difficult time deciding when to stop.

It was in college that I started drinking pretty regularly to intoxication, and I wouldn't say that that was ever the aim. I think the biggest problem I've always had, I don't really drink any more, was...is that I don't...I'm not sure that I know what my limit is. I know that I can drink a lot. I have a high tolerance for it, but I also drink quite a bit. I don't...once I start, it's hard for me to stop.

Danny (30)

Whereas Danny referred to heavy drinking as consisting of both frequency and quantity,

Jay defined it as only quantity.

I would drink four days out of the week, generally, and at least one or two of those would be like, you know, heavy drinking. It's kind of like...the next morning, you sort of, like...you're walking to the cafeteria, right, and then you see everybody, like, waving at you, like, "Hey, [Jay]." I was like, "You...what's up? I don't remember you." So, that's what's embarrassing. I...it happened a couple of times, but...I can't think of any specific...examples...I think someone, at some point, put something in my drink. I'm pretty convinced of that, cause I...I...I did not drink that much, and bad just went...the night just went (exhales). So, that's something that, you know...usually, men don't have to be careful about these kinds of things, but I guess it happens...apparently so.

Jay (22)

According to Hunter, heavy drinking can be seen as leading to trouble.

I had gotten into a little bit of trouble...not as far as, like, legal or anything like that, but just...you know...altercations...kind of arise from heavy drinking, and...you know...I'm not going to say I wish I did it different, because I feel like I've learned something from everything that I've done, so I would never take back a lot of things that I've done wrong, because I feel like I've learned from those, so...I wouldn't really do it different or take anything back.

Hunter (26)

### *Alcoholic Drinking*

Several informants drew a distinction between drinking they classify as that of an alcoholic and that they do not. Hunter describes an intimate knowledge of the damage alcoholism can do to an individual and his or her family.

[My experience with alcohol has] taught me...my limitations. It's taught me that people can be...heavily influenced by alcohol. It's, you know, I've seen...my mother, an ex-alcoholic, my father, an ex-alcoholic, my grandfather used to be a real heavy alcoholic. So, I've seen it ruin lives and I've seen people, also, just have a good time with it. So...I think I've seen all aspects of it. I've seen the good with the parties and people getting along and having fun. I've seen the bad, where it can mess up a household. It can cause strained tensions between friends. It can cause altercations. It can cause legal repercussions. I've seen all of the different avenues that can go with it. So, I guess...yeah, I mean, I've pretty much seen it all around. So, I mean it's...it showed me and taught me...the...the...I guess...it taught me to respect my limits and know them. You know, it helped me find them, but it also taught me...through watching others and through doing it myself, that you need to know your limit and you need to adhere to that, because if not, then things go awry and things can happen.

Hunter (26)

Hunter states that this has taught him to identify and respect the amount he drinks in order to avoid falling into this category himself.

Bryant described the dangers of alcohol, as well as a few other drugs, to make the point that alcohol can be just as harmful to a person as many other drugs, although simultaneously more insidious due to its social acceptability.

I think there are a lot of social misconceptions, you know, like in America, or in the West or the whole world, we have this idea that...okay, there's...most people drink, but most people aren't alcoholics and we know an alcoholic when we see it, but there's some drugs that are just deemed so bad that using it once much mean that you're an addict, you know. So, if you...if you just used cocaine.[...] Alcohol is this...you know...and that's the dangerous part about it, is that it's so socially

acceptable and it's so common.[...] I understand why it is the way it is, but, I mean alcohol...on every level is really the worst, other than instant addiction (snaps). You know, I mean...taking a hit of smokeable cocaine is...I mean, and you can measure...you know, they can measure crystal methamphetamine, how much more potent as far as how much dopamine and, you know, serotonin it releases, sure, the actual rush is not as powerful as alcohol, but if we look at...nobody shoots heroin and then beats their wife. You know, nobody smokes a joint and then gets into a car accident...I mean, maybe few and far between, of course these other drugs can also impair your motor functions, but...you know, nobody turns into a raving lunatic. I mean, you can give me enough alcohol to where it's not even me anymore. I'm not saying that as an excuse, you know, like...you know, like, I'm not one of these people that, you know, beats on my girlfriend and said, "Oh, hey, I was drunk. It's okay." But, I mean, alcohol, just because of the very nature of it, the way that it works on your body. I mean, it can just make you do so many horrible things...and it's responsible for so many deaths, and not only just...part of that, yes, is because it's so widespread. You know, people say, "Oh, you know, alcohol and tobacco kill so many more people than illicit drugs." Well, counter to that is, well, way more people smoke and drink than shoot heroin. But, either when you control for that. Even when you look at the per capita studies, and I don't want to just make up some numbers out of my ass, because I haven't looked at them in a while, but I believe, last time I looked, it's still alcohol and tobacco kill more...or at least it's comparable. It's not what people would think.

Bryant (26)

Later in our discussion, Bryant describes his father's regular drinking, but that this does not make him an alcoholic.

My [father is] definitely not an alcoholic. I wouldn't even say a problem drinker. I mean, he drank...and still does, about every night, but really...and I'm not defending my father. I mean, if...if he was an alcoholic, I'd say it and if he was a problem drinker, I'd say it. You know, I have no problem talking about his faults, but...he really only drinks a few drinks. You know, they might have happy hour...my father drinks more, but mom and grandma might drink one, two. He might drink, like, four or five, but throughout the course of a night.

Bryant (26)

Bryant indicated that he would be an alcoholic if he did not prefer the effects of other drugs.

I drank last week because I went to a Red Hot Chili Peppers concert...because to me now, I mean, it was more of a situational thing, you know...but, like I said, if there was no other substances, I'm sure I would be an alcoholic. If I didn't have my choice from...you know...I'm sure it would be alcohol.

Bryant (26)

He acknowledged that of the people in college who "drink like alcoholics," he knows that only a portion will be able to stop.

I have seen some research showing...with college kids...they showed this scale of alcohol abuse...and then...it goes up and up and up, but...and of course, some people continue on and on past college and they become full-blown alcoholics for the rest of their life. But, there is an alarmingly high, a counter-intuitively high amount of...of people that drink like alcoholics up until college, and then stop after college, which would show that it's just a lifestyle thing, and it's a party thing, you know. So...everybody's different. I mean, that's the human condition.

Bryant (26)

Bryant also stated an awareness that many alcohol "loses its luster" for many alcoholics, who may or may not be denial about their addiction.

How important is opiates to me? I mean, there was a time when I was younger and...I knew...I still knew I was an addict, but I wasn't sick of it yet and I thought it was cool and it was nostalgic and it was, you know, it was...it was neat. You know, William Burroughs and all that shit, but now I'm jaded...you know, just like you ask any old gang member, you ask any older drug addict, it all loses its luster and it becomes shit. It's the same story over and over. So...with alcohol, I'm sure it's the same thing, but if you ask someone who is an alcoholic who is in denial what they think of alcohol, you know, they might say, "Oh, yeah. It's great." You know? And if you ask someone who is not an alcoholic...just a normal person, like you...I mean, I'm assuming. Maybe you are not an addict; you're probably just a normal person. You know, you don't have a negative or a

positive opinion of alcohol, you know. You...you might want to have wine with dinner, or beer, you know, you might be into microbreweries like my brother, you know. So, if you told someone like him that you could never drink alcohol ever again, he would probably be upset by it. He wouldn't understand it, but it wouldn't ruin his life, you know. For me...I don't really care. I mean, because I know that there's going to come a time that, you know, I'm going to have to deal with this shit and I'm going to have to not ever be able to use any psychoactive substance ever, alcohol or any other thing.

Bryant (26)

Walter pointed out that a person who would not be considered an alcoholic in his native South American culture may very well be considered one in a different culture, such as that of the United States.

I mean, growing up, not that I would say I had a family of alcoholics, but I had a family of people who...who liked to drink, you know? Getting together at night, on the weekends, you know. I've got uncles, grandparents...I mean, they would just drink themselves silly, but never, you know...it was very casual. I was around it. You know, if there was large family gatherings and this would be happening, you know, my mother will probably...you know, she'll drink...she'll drink every night, not excessively, but, you know, it's just very casual, no? It's not seen as, like, oh, these guys are alcoholics, this and the other. So...so yeah, it was very...very present, but it wasn't like this, oh my God, Uncle Bob is smashed again, you know, like...it's just part of...part of the culture, I guess. You know? But [people who live in that country] drink...a lot. But I think that can be said for a lot of, you know, South American countries.[...]But...yeah, it wasn't like this taboo thing, you know? I mean, now that I'm older, looking back, I see a lot of these uncles and stuff...I mean...I guess, technically, yes, they are alcoholics, you know, but...but they're not angry people. They're not bad people. They're not...do you know what I mean? They just like their drink, but they still function. They still get up the next morning, go to work early, and...so that's...that's really it. No history of...abuse or neglect or...you know...very happy drinkers.

Walter (27)

In these words, Walter pointed out that the idea and definition of an alcoholic is culturally specific. Grant stated that his parents did not discuss the dangers or benefits of alcohol with him as a child because they did not have any family members who were alcoholics.

I would say there was no discussion. I mean, they're...when I turned, like, 18, 21 they were like, "You can drink." I mean, they didn't have anything against it. I mean, none in my are alcoholics.[...]So they just drink when...just...for pleasure. Just, kind of, for...like a leisure activity, so...so I've been blessed to not have family members, that I know of, who are addicted to alcohol...of all sorts.

Grant (22)

Grant, while sharing his career aspirations to help alcoholics, reveals a lot about what he understands people need the alcohol to do as well as why they use it.

I mean, there's just been a lot of things that...have influenced me. I mean, that's why I want to be a...counselor working with alcoholics, just because I think that...a lot of people are...controlled by the alcohol substance. You know, they need it to...be able to...function. They need it to be able to...you know, spit game with the opposite sex. You know, they need it to...be the life of the party, which you could always be the life of the party on your own. It's just that they buy into this culture that they've kind of been brought up with, where it's because of entertainment, movies, friends, family, or anything like that. I mean, there's a lot of factors that trickle in...that kind of influence people to kind of like still hold onto that concept of why they drink.

Grant (22)

### *Binge Drinking*

Many colleges and public health organizations use the idea of "binge drinking" to communicate information about the dangers of drinking. Only one informant chose to use this term, the one currently receiving treatment for addiction to other substances, as described his drinking as exclusively goal-oriented.

Alcohol is just another substance, you know? The beer is just a method entry...the route of administration, you know, so... I mean, don't get me wrong. I mean, sometimes, when I haven't had a beer in a while and I first drink it, I'm like, oh, yeah. That is good. But, I'm not drinking, like, you know...these nice beers, you know. Because I'm drinking to get drunk, so...you know, you don't want to...you



don't want to drink a real thick, expensive beer to get drunk. So, you want to drink 15 or 20 of them, you know, it gets disgusting. Who wants to drink like 20 Heineken or Beck's or something? It's too...too much. So, I'm definitely, you know, a binge drinker. I can't...I mean...you know, even when I got clean from opiates, you know, that's the biggest problem for, you know, an early recovery, because alcohol wasn't my problem, so...I think, oh, well, I can still drink, you know? As long as I stay away from the pills and the opiates and hard drugs, but...you know, it's all connected, you know? A drug is a drug and it does the same thing to your brain.[...]It's nice to fall back on, alcohol. But...but year, for me...I'll even say. Like, I will purposely turn down alcohol if I'm in a situation where I know I'm not going to be able to enjoy it. Because, like, I don't...not only do I...would I prefer to binge drink, I'd rather have no alcohol than 2 beers. I don't like that feeling. I don't like the feeling of one beer or two beers. Because I can feel half a beer. I can feel a few sips, I shit you not. And some of it might be psychological, but...everyone talks about how tough they are with their big tolerance. You know, I can feel a beer. I'm not wasted, but...I don't like that effect. Like, I don't enjoy it. It's gross. It's a chore to have to drink...or, that's why I usually just drink liquor, because it's easier. Of course, it tastes like shit. But...yeah, I mean...it's just a substance to me, and...I have no control over how much I drink, you know...if I get past that point, you know. Sure, pay me a thousand bucks, I could drink 4 and stop, if I had to, but...if I'm in a club setting or something, it's...it's definitely...it's going to be binge drinking. It's going to be...until I...I don't usually throw up, but it's to the point where I don't want to drink anymore, because I know...I'm one beer away from getting the spins or getting sick. So, I'll drink until I basically can't anymore...or I fall asleep.

Bryant (26)

Bryant, in his search for an experience brought through intoxication, identified himself as a binge drinker. This, to him, means that drinking right up to the point where he gets sick. If he is unable to drink this much, he would rather have no alcohol at all.

### *Responsible Drinking*

The alternative to binge drinking is often described by interest groups as “responsible drinking.” Throughout their narratives, informants expressed their ideas about what constitutes this type of drinking. Each time the notion of responsible drinking

was mentioned, it was done in reference to finding alternate means of transportation when a person is intoxicated. Danny said he made this connection between responsibility and safe driving while going to dances at the Moose Lodge with his grandparents as a child.

I guess he...taught me more responsibility, because if he'd drink and my grand...you know, then my grandmother wouldn't and she would drive. If my grandmother would drink then my grandfather wouldn't and he would drive, so...I guess I learned...if anything, I learned responsibility when it comes to it.

Danny (30)

Danny also described his mother offering amnesty should he ever get stranded somewhere while intoxicated.

She was also somewhat liberal in the fact that she said if I ever was somewhere and I ever did drink, that if I...if I couldn't...if I needed to get home or I was at a place I couldn't stay, that she wouldn't be mad at me if I called her to pick me up, because she didn't want me to drink...you know, drive drunk. So it was kind of a...really, in a way, it's a mixed message, because she didn't really want me to, but at the same time, in a way, she's kind of saying, if you do and you need me to come and get you, it's not a...you know, she wouldn't be mad at me.

Danny (30)

While at his second college, the one where he engaged in more "heavy drinking," Danny described proximity to drinking opportunities, one making driving unnecessary, as being a contributing factor.

I lived on campus, but directly off campus in an apartment, and it was an apartment complex in which...me and three of my friends were in an apartment, and we had...at the other, like on the same level at the other end of the complex, the building, were three more of our friends and three more of our friends were in another building in the same apartment complex, so, I mean, we didn't really have

to go very far to drink, plus we didn't have to drive, so, I mean, we'd typically...I mean, we would go to parties, sometimes. When I was dating a girl up there, she liked to go to different peoples' parties, so I would go to different parties with her, but typically I would always pretty much drink with the same people.

Danny (30)

Jorge also discussed this as the utmost importance to his mother, who he reported offered a similar sort of amnesty agreement.

They always said...especially after...I got in trouble when I was 15 with my mom, drinking, that time where I fell...or I woke up in that lady's bed. She just told me, if you're ever drunk, don't drive. You know, just call me. I won't be mad at you. I would be more mad at you if you got drunk, drove, killed yourself, killed somebody else, you know. She just...she's...you know, she always says that, like, her kids are everything, especially now that she's...you know, divorced. It really is like all she has had...is like her family.

Jorge (22)

This is a belief Jorge reported he has adopted as well.

If I'm out drinking, I usually have to, like, you know, sleep where I sleep. Like, I...I won't drive home, because that's just...that's not smart for me or for anyone...and...yeah, you know, kind of...you get known as like a couch surfer sometimes, you know, kind of someone that just, you know...will fall asleep wherever, either at the lacrosse house or at the fraternity house, whatever it is...like, wherever you can until you're good enough to drive.

Jorge (22)

A person in Jorge's fraternity has suffered consequences from drinking and driving, and, as a group, Jorge says that those in this fraternity try to prevent other people driving when they are "obviously hammered."

There is a guy that got a DUI and then he got another DUI, so I don't really know if he necessarily learned from his first mistake, but... There was the other

guy...that showed the pictures of, like...of his wreck, was...you know, he was trying to get the point across that, like, look...I'm an idiot. I made a mistake. Don't make the same mistake I did. And...I think it really changed the...I guess...not the...not the way we drink, but the way we, like, monitor each other, like...like, you know, if we see somebody that's like, you know, obviously hammered, and like, they've got their keys and they're trying to go drive, we will do our best to stop them, you know? In the end, it's their decision, and some people still choose to drive, and you know, that's...that's something that we can't really control, but to...as much as we can, we try and promote, you know, safe...safe drinking, you know.

Jorge (22)

Emmanuel spoke about receiving a DUI when he was working in a bar in his early 20s.

I got a DUI once. I wish that hadn't have happened, but...I...I mean, I didn't...that wasn't even...I hadn't drink...wasn't drinking to be intoxicated and I didn't feel like I was intoxicated, but...I blew slightly over the legal limit. I had a headlight out and got pulled on my way home. It was when I worked in a bar, and at the end of the night, we would have drinks...at the end of the night, and...I left the bar, and on the way home, got pulled for the light being out. Yeah, that was bad.[...] I never realized two drinks would have me blowing over the limit. I mean, I may have...I'm sure people told me that, but I...you know...I guess I never really...I don't want to say I didn't believe it, but it just wasn't something I thought about until that, and then after that, I just became more vigilant about not driving if I drink at all, or at least putting a good span of time between any drinks whatsoever and driving. But...as far as anything else, no...it didn't...it didn't change anything in my behavior.[...]I mean I had always, like...found a designated driver. I never really drank and then drove, other than, you know, just maybe like one of two drinks. I always thought I was pretty responsible about it, but apparently that wasn't the case.

Emmanuel (30)

Emmanuel said that he believed he was careful about not driving while impaired until being arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol. This arrest served as a recalibration of what he considered to be responsible driving.

Before the DUI, I never drank...I never...like...looking at it now, I guess I should say maybe I did drink too much and drive, but I never thought I did. Like, I would never drive after I had drank more than a couple of drinks. And I've always been a fairly sizeable person. I mean, you know...I've gained a few pounds in the past few years, but I never thought that 2 drinks was enough to have me intoxicated over the legal limit. And I've never drove...when I actually felt, personally, that I was intoxicated, ever. I don't think...I'm trying to think of any occasion...I don't believe so. But...as far as just like legally speaking, I've...I guess I did apparently drive sometimes above the...legal alcohol blood content level, but...post the DUI, I don't even do that. Like, now...it's got to be at least 4...3 or 4 hours between me having even a single drink and driving. I just won't do it.

Emmanuel (30)

When asked to describe what he thought the worst part of drinking is, he said that the only downside to the practice is an increased "inability to be sensible."

I guess if...drinking too much can be bad, but that's not necessarily a bad...the downside of drinking. That's a more a downside of...your own...inability to be sensible, I suppose. I mean, a lot of people do drink and...become intoxicated and drive. That's pretty bad. So, I guess that's probably the worst thing. But, you know, speaking for me specifically, I don't really see any big downside, because...I never thought that I was drinking to the point where I shouldn't drive and then after I got the DUI, definitely...absolutely do not now, so...I mean, there's no real down side to it, unless you're irresponsible.

Emmanuel (30)

Jay described a situation where he woke up after a late night of drinking and found himself intoxicated. He said that he placed his car in an unknown location the night before to minimize the chances that he would drive when it would not be responsible.

I guess that's all we were drinking, everclear, and...the next morning, I had to [attend] class, and the next morning.[...]It was supposed to be 9:30 until 12:30...3:30, and I woke up the next morning at 12:30, and I was like, "Oh, no." And I was just like still drunk, and...you know. It took me a while to get out of bed. The shower didn't...I turned the shower on and I think I started walking around looking for someone to drive me, because obviously I couldn't drive. I had

hid my car the night before, because I thought I was going to get drunk, so I didn't want to drive it...I don't know why I thought about hiding my car. I couldn't find it for 2 days. It was pretty bad. But I didn't drive, so that's good. And then, you know, the class was just horrible. I brought my friend with me and he was pretty drunk too, and he didn't help at all. So that's something that, you know, even though nothing bad happened, it still...it's embarrassing, because...I take pride in the things that I do, and, you know, my involvement in the things that I... my responsibilities. I take pride in that, so...it...it can get in the way of it, definitely. And I consider myself a responsible person, so when something like that happens, it's definitely a...you know...it's even harder than if you're used to it, I guess.

Jay (22)

Jay made it clear that he considers responsibility to be a crucial component of his identity. Bruce described staged drinking as another way to practice both social drinking and responsible drinking.

I know sometimes, my friends and I...like, if I'm not going to be, like, the driver for the night, sometimes...like, I would just have like a beer, and, like...just...make that beer last like throughout the whole night, so we can drive back or something...you know...but, I guess...so, like, you...definitely, if you're in a surrounding where...everyone is drinking and everyone has a drink in their hand, and...you're the only one that's not, and they're going to be like, oh, why aren't you drinking? So, just to avoid that question, you just like...whether it's empty, or like if it's a can...whether it's empty or not, you just hold on to it. So, like, people don't, like, approach you about it.

Bruce (22)

### *Couples Drinking*

Several informants described markedly different drinking patters during periods when they were in romantic relationships.

I was in a relationship at that time, so...if...if at all, it was like, you know, we would do, like, some couples drinking with some other couples, but it was really

scaled back...like, to kind of the...the married life of just really...spending time with that person more than like getting drunk with them, per se.

Jorge (22)

Walter reported going out less frequently while having a girlfriend.

These are friends that I'd meet, you know, I have a friend, he's introduce me to so and so, we'd end up getting along. "Hey, let's hang out." Over time, you build relationships, friendships. Yeah, and I got a girlfriend, at the time, who was from there, so she introduced me to a lot of people and a lot of my time, also. You get a girlfriend, you tend to go out less. Yeah. So...that plays into it.[...]I'm not one who is opposed to like a...you know, a beer after work or something, but, yeah, the Friday and Saturday thing was really dependent, cause like I said, I had a girlfriend. Some nights we would just stay in and watch a movie. Some nights, we would...you know, maybe just go have dinner or something.

Walter (27)

Isaac described his drinking companions fit into one of two groups: girlfriends/ex-girlfriends and teammates.

I only really had two groups my entire life. It's been guys from the team and girlfriends, or ex-girlfriends...and that's about it. There have never really been any other kind of friends.

Isaac (21)

After getting a girlfriend during his senior year of high school, Isaac did not report a substantial change in his overall frequency of drinking, but indicated that it was now mostly influenced by his romantic partner.

The style of drinking in senior year, I had a...a girlfriend who was a lot older, and there was still...and she was old enough to buy alcohol, and it was still, pretty much, like...celebratory stuff, you know, like...you know, you want to fight, or something, but...but like, when we would drink, it would be like...white rum, like 100 percent proof, and we would, you know, just try to get drunk.[...]Very goal-

oriented drinking...when we did, which was still very rare for me at the time, but...but...I can't even say rare. Like...not annual either...like once every two months kind of thing.[...] She was definitely a big influence to drink, because, like, I don't know...like...she was always just like...she made it seem more fun if we drank and did the things that we normally did...do you know what I mean...she's like, "Well, it'd be so much better if we were drunk." Who am I to argue with her, you know?

Isaac (21)

During his sophomore year of college, Isaac drank mostly with his girlfriend at the time and the members of her athletic team.

I also had a girlfriend at that time, so...I would go and drink with her team, and...her team actually drank more than any other team. And you wouldn't expect a women's team to be drunkards like that, but they were drunkards, win, lose or draw, they were having a frigging blowout party. And I never understood that. I'm like, aren't you full of shame and disgrace right now from losing so badly? They're like, "Woooo." So...I just never understood.

Isaac (21)

Isaac indicated that this group of women would try to get him to drink more than he wanted, but were largely unsuccessful. When he wasn't with his girlfriend and her team, he said he would regularly choose to stay home with just his girlfriend and not consume alcohol.

They would try, but they didn't have enough...pull. Their peer pressure...I mean, because I was already...I already had a girl, so I already knew who I was going home with, so...I didn't really have any need to impress any of those girls.[...] [My girlfriend] kind of became more important than drinking, do you know what I mean? So, I would be there at the...or if I did go to a party, which most...I would just avoid to stay home with her, you know? Then...when I went to the parties, I didn't stay long or I didn't drink, because the mission is already accomplished.

Isaac (21)



Isaac stated that he considered the primary function of alcohol to be as an instrument to impress females.

The way I thought about alcohol was like a...like...you could impress women with it, if you were to drink, I don't know...more than them, sometimes. It's really...really...like, really superficial...how it goes. And...I don't know...it was a way to meet them, like...if you were drunk, then all of a sudden, like, it's okay for her...like, okay...I've seen women drink maybe one or two beers, or like...we...like...pour some shots, and then put half water in everyone else's but our own, just because we didn't want to share, and the girls will still act the same, no matter how much they drink. And things become acceptable that normally didn't, and since you're drunk too, it's okay...is what they say.

Isaac (21)

While Isaac was home the following summer, he drank in an attempt to spend time with another woman.

That summer, even though I had a girlfriend, we kind of...I don't know...we weren't talking, and I met another girl who worked at a bar, and then that really started...I drank the whole time I was home, and I was home for another, like, 3 weeks. She worked in the bar, so...I got really good at pool. I was there all day, just...‘Oh, do you want another...’ and then she'd come over, ‘Do you want another beer?’ And like, you know, my throat is sore, I'd dehydrated, but I'm like, ‘Yeah, give me that thing.’

Isaac (21)

Jay described his schedule as being full and just wanting to wind down with his girlfriend once he gets home.

The girl I'm dating right now...I'm still dating her...I guess...you know...it's...this is how it works. I'm wiped out. So, I...get out of class, I go to work, get out of meetings, and then...you know...I'm home. I want to watch a movie. I want to go to sleep. Okay...I'll go to sleep...and that's how it works. A lot, well every night...it at least becomes the trend. You know, you get out of class, and, you know, spend the night together, so I either go to her house or she

comes to mine, and...and we stay in, you know, either do homework, or watch Friends. That's the only show that I watch on television.

Jay (22)

Sometimes, these evenings at home Jay spends with his girlfriend do include drinking a bottle of wine together.

Interviewer: You mentioned that you would, like, have a bottle of wine these days.

Jay: Yeah

Interviewer: I assume you share that with someone, or do you spread it over time?

Jay: Yeah, I...you know, I mean...most times [my girlfriend and I] finish the bottle in one, but it's between me and her. You know, we start with dinner, and then we just sort of go watch a movie or something and take it with us and finish it off. Not by myself.

Jay (22)

Jay did report drinking sometimes going out to drink with his girlfriend, but only a small amount due to his desire to drink responsibly.

She is in the same sorority of the girl that I used to date before, so there's kind of not a lot of good relationships, so...we don't really hang out with her friends. But, you know, she hangs out with my friends, and...we go out sometimes, anyway...go to bars, or have get-togethers, or have a couple of drinks, but...I'm usually, you know, driving, so I don't...I don't really drink that much either.

Jay (22)

Danny, the only informant who reported being married, talked about a substantial change in drinking when he met his wife. In their four year relationship, he said he has only consumed alcohol with her one time.

I guess the last time...4 years ago...we were...like I said, she is from [another state in the Southeastern United States]; we were up staying with her...sister and her brother-in-law. They lived in [a mid-sized city], which is where [a public university] is at, and we had gone up there for a football game over Labor Day weekend, and they always have...and they don't live up there anymore, but...at that time, they had a house that was right beside the stadium, and a lot of their friends that they went to college with at [that school] would come and they would spend the weekend up there for...during the football games, and...that's the only time...I've ever drank with my wife, I guess, was that one time.

Danny (30)

This limited drinking was described as being relatively new for both Danny and his wife.

I guess we both have spoken of our...you know, talked about our past, you know...I guess, you know...she did quite a bit of drinking when she was in college, too. I guess she did a lot more than I did in high school, as well, from what I can tell, from what she says, but, no, I mean, we don't really...she said...she's never seen me drunk or intoxicated, so...she says she always wondered...she's heard stories, I guess, from my friends and whatnot, because apparently, I'm a...I'm a...entertaining drunk. So, she says she's always wanted to see me drunk, but I've never been intoxicated around her, but...I guess it's not, like, one of those things where, you know, that's on her bucket list or something to see me drunk.

Danny (30)

Danny described this change as an easy one for him because alcohol no longer holds the social utility he said it once did.

I'm not saying I wasn't going to...I was not going to drink period, ever again, but I guess I made the decision that I was going to...when I drink socially that I would drink responsibly, again, and...and it just led to a...I guess a 4 year sobriety, up until Monday, I guess. I mean, not sobriety because I didn't get drunk, but you know what I mean, that I just didn't drink anything for about 4 years. But I never sat around and said, no, I'm not going to drink any more. I think...well...I've never had much...even through all of my drinking experiences revolve around females, girls that I was interested in, I've never ever really been good at meeting girls outside of the loop that I know, so like the girls that I would drink with in high school...were already part of our group. You get interested in

them and then you would drink, and...or not...they go to the parties, and then...I guess...alcohol was always sort of liquid courage, even for girls that I knew. It made it a little bit easier to talk to them. But with my wife, we met online, so we had talked quite a bit before we ever met in person. So maybe that plays an aspect to it that...I already kind of knew her going in, and our first date was relatively awkward. I mean, most first dates are. We...we knew a lot about each other going into our first date, but meeting for the first time was kind of strange, and...but I never felt the need to drink for courage, I guess, in that respect.

Danny (30)

### *Masculine Drinking*

Several informants described drinking behavior in terms of masculinity. One of them, Jorge, attributes his father giving him his first beer to “break [him] into manhood.”

Yeah. I can remember I was 13 when my dad gave me my first beer, and it was after...or, no...I guess it was 15, but what...he had moved out of Wilmington, and he kind of was...I guess he was trying to be “cool dad,” but we were...we were at this like...yacht club or beach club, whatever, and just gave me a...like, I think it was like a Miller in a foam cup, and he said, “Just sip on this.” You know, kind of trying to...I guess, break you into manhood, because like, I mean, he was a fraternity guy, so...I don’t know if he...you know, I don’t think he was trying to turn me into an alcoholic, but he was just, kind of...letting me experience that before I experience it on my own, you know. Which, I mean, I think I had at that point, obviously, but...as far as he was concerned, he was trying to help culture me into...socially drinking.

Jorge (22)

Jorge connects masculinity, being in a fraternity, and social drinking in this statement. In doing so, he is describing manhood as being able to control one’s drinking. The idea of joining a fraternity in an effort to become “somebody who is a gentleman, courteous, and honest” came up later in our discussion when he desired to repair what he perceived to be his moral failings.

I guess we broke up that summer, just because...we went to different schools, so it just wasn't really working out as far as getting to see each other enough and what we were getting out of the relationship...at least for me. And...I mean, that...that, pretty much, sprung me into...I need to join a fraternity...not necessarily to...to, like, meet a new girl, but just to...to...to better myself, because I kept telling her that...I felt like I needed some time to better myself. You know, like I had...I had problems with telling the truth to her, and, you know...you know, if I was, like, drinking at the lacrosse party, you know, she wouldn't want to hear that, so if I didn't...if I didn't tell her that and she found out later, it would be real bad, so...you know, just...not being...not being honest, and, you know, not...not being a gentleman, I guess, you know. And I felt like fraternity men, you know, not a frat guy, but a fraternity man is supposed to be somebody who is a gentleman, courteous, and honest, so...I felt like if I could find a fraternity that could build me up that way, then that's be...like a good transition for me. But, like, along with coming in a fraternity comes the organizational drinking, as I call it.

Jorge (22)

As Jorge states, a large part of fraternity life is “organizational drinking,” which he also described as being a part of the sports team he participated in the previous year. He described drinking with the sports team as

The first, like, organized drinking I had seen, where like, people...or, at least...like, where people would like throw in on like a keg or like, you know, throw in money for, like PJ...for like mass drinking, I guess.

Jorge (22)

Jorge makes it clear that he considers fraternity life to be an aid in his journey to become a gentleman. He makes it clear, however, that these lessons are not to be learned by following the examples of other fraternity members.

When you join the fraternity...they have like this like Greek life EDU thing, which is like a drinking assessment, where they teach you all the dangers of drinking, but...you really learn the dangers of drinking from stories from your...your brothers, you know...kind of...you know, either...whether it's

hooking up with a girl that wasn't very pretty, or, you know, getting a DUI. Like, they're all...lessons to be learned, as far as, like, you know, your judgment, and like, how it's not...it's not the same as when you're sober.

Jorge (22)

I think being a junior helped me out, as far as like, not...not wanting to just, like, necessarily look up to somebody as much and like emulate them, but kind of take what they do, and do it better, you know? If I'm going to drink, be responsible. Don't get sloppy or make a fool of yourself in front of people that you're not, like, comfortable being...being a fool in front of, you know?

Jorge (22)

Near the end of our discussion, Jorge projected a masculine role when asked to personify his relationship with alcohol.

I guess in the social setting, I'd label alcohol as my wingman. It kind of...if I...if I'm debating on whether I'm going to do something, I might drink on it, you know...like chug, and then think about it while I'm chugging, and kind of, you know, as I'm done chugging, I've kind of made that decision, so...whether alcohol makes you make a good decision or a bad decision, it kind of...gets the process of thinking going in my head, at least. You know, it's like...if I don't know what to say to a girl, I'll just drink until I know what to say.

Jorge (22)

Bruce also joined a fraternity, but did not connect masculinity with it in any way.

I mean, nothing really changed. I wouldn't say that because joining a fraternity...changed my drinking habits...in any way. There would be some special occasions, like...when we have, like, new brothers, like...when we would celebrate...when we would drink, but...in terms of, like, the way I drank, it was...I mean...and which is...I've seen from other brothers where they...acquire like this really bad drinking habit over a period of time, but...I didn't, like...increasingly drink, just because I joined a fraternity. It just stayed the same.

Bruce (22)

Danny describes masculine drinking in another way: being able to drink a lot.

I wish I knew a little bit more about myself when I was intoxicated, because, apparently, it made me into quite an entertaining person. I mean, I think I'm entertaining anyway, for my friends, but even more so...so, I mean, it was...for them, it was a...and then in some ways, like I said, I drank a lot and I had a very high tolerance, so...I was sort of an epic drinker, you know. It was one of those...I hate to use a term like this, but like manly type drinking, you know, great men who drink a lot. I was a big wrestling fan growing up, and...got away from it years later, but I remember always reading stories about Andre the Giant, considered...you know, you'd see stuff...you can look up stuff now on the internet. You know, they've got a website somewhere dedicated to historical, legendary drinkers and stuff like that, and Andre the Giant, because he was so big, would drink like 130 beers in a night.[...]Because...and, I mean, this is not even, like, exaggerated. This is actual...this is what he really did, because it was, like, you know, legendary type of drinking, and...and I guess, in that way, I was...amongst my friends in any case, I was...a legendary type of drinker, because I would drink a lot of alcohol in, you know, in one night.

Danny (30)

Isaac described drinking with his teammates as having a competitive nature.

I did drink, and like I said, it's still pretty much the same...or it was still pretty much the same, but it was, maybe, like...once...or twice a week, we would drink. Twice a week, and then, like, there would be spurts where I just wouldn't drink for a long time, so maybe like...and it was mostly celebratory, as well, I think...after a match or something like that, or...when all the freshmen finally got there, but it was...my drinking habits drastically changed, like...it was drinking more heavily...it was like, how many beers can you drink, rather than, like...before, it was like...you know...I don't know...I never stopped and counted, but it was like you wanted to have this big pile of like, beers. You wanted to have, like, a thousand cans. If you could finish a big one, then you were the man.[...]Yes. Yes, it got very competitive.

Isaac (21)

Isaac went on to describe how drinking with the intent of meeting people was also seen as a competitive endeavor.

It's a comp...it's like a pissing contest, and it's...for people to prove who is tougher, who is, you know...they, actually, sometimes, I think people would...make a connection between maturity and...and drinking.[...]Yeah, they would make like a connection between maturity and drinking, like...people would say things, like...'Oh, he's such a kid.' "Oh, why?" "Because he can't hold his liquor. He's two beer queer." He's this, he's that. Like, people would be...you know...if you couldn't drink a lot, then you were basically more childish, I guess. So, it was definitely, like, a way to prove yourself. It's a competition and it a way to, like, meet people. I think.

Isaac (21)

## **Summary**

The above categorizations can only be understood as general types. Due to the volatility of alcohol and the mediation of unexpected factors, the categorizations in this section do not always play out as intended. As a result, they do not necessarily satisfy the specific intent used to select the approach to drinking. In many of these instances, a new intent will be selected to match the style of drinking one finds himself to be already involved in.

The narrative created in the interview situation can be seen as a situated identity created through reflection and meaning-making. As informants create and make use of past encounters with alcohol to engage in identity exploration, they each construct a list of intents and a set of different approaches to drinking that, if used successfully, match up and create an experience deemed to be successful.

As the categorizations of drinking were constructed in an interview situation, these may differ from the way people understand drinking behavior employed while in the practice of drinking. While actively consuming alcohol, drinkers access changing



contextual, social, and experiential information that help them construct and access different understandings of alcohol use.

In the next chapter, we look at how the notion of control is described at different points in the narratives constructed by informants. This will provide a sense of the dynamic character of the relationships the informants created and the varying levels of control reported at different times in the drinking career.

## CHAPTER VIII

### NARRATIVES OF CONTROL

Each informant reported that his drinking behavior was currently under his control at the time of the interview, but did not all indicate that this was always the case. One group of informants constructed a narrative that portrays the speaker as always having control over their drinking. These people describe consistency in both intent and practice. For the purposes of this report, these will be referred to as “continuous control narratives.”

Alternatively, “recaptured control narratives” are those that describe the speaker as having had to make changes in their drinking style in order to achieve his goals at the time at the time of the interview. Informants who employed this narrative spoke about past behaviors as either obstructive or distracting. The narratives in this group illustrate a struggle for control one tries to grasp in his relationship with alcohol as a part of the identity exploration that is a crucial feature of the emerging adulthood period.

#### **Continuous Control Narratives**

Most of the informants who told continuous control narratives depicted themselves as focused on other things. Isaac, for one, reported being very focused on his sport.

When I was in high school, I was, like, completely against fun of any sort, because I thought it would impede...like, get in the way of being [good at my sport], you know. That's all I cared about. I didn't care about anything else.

Isaac (21)

Only when he felt it would not interfere, did Isaac drink alcohol.

I was terrible my freshman year at [my sport], but then, by my junior year, I was pretty decent, and...you know...so I didn't have to work as hard to win. So, I actually...like, I remember drinking a little bit more often...going to a few parties with some of the guys from the team and things like that.

Isaac (21)

When he moved to his current school, he took the advice of his coach and lived far away from his teammates. When he talked about drinking during this period, he would sometimes connect it to his sport by calling it “celebratory.”

I didn't ever...I never lived on campus or in the dorms. I was always off campus...and my coach did that for a reason, because we have some guys on the team who are very, very big partiers, and...but, when I did drink, and like I said, it's still pretty much the same...or it was still pretty much the same, but it was, maybe, like...once...or twice a week, we would drink. Twice a week, and then, like, there would be spurts where I just wouldn't drink for a long time, so maybe like...and it was mostly celebratory, as well, I think...after a match or something like that.

Isaac (21)

After returning to college for his senior year, Isaac reported drinking less with other people and more by himself. He connected this to his sport in his narrative in a different manner, by mentioning it as a way to deal with pain from practice.

You know, you get bummed out, or, you know, you're hurting, or...you know, your muscles torn up, so...you go down...I've got a little local bar that I go to, and

became a regular, you know, pretty much self-medicated. Like, any time there was a problem, you know, not that many people to talk to, so...just go down there to the bar, have a few, and then come home, fall asleep. (Laughs) So pitiful.

Isaac (21)

Isaac also described alcohol fluctuation based on the women he was romantically interested in or involved with. The problems he spoke of in the above quote were attributed to these women.

Oh, pretty much every time I spoke to my ex, because there was always drama, or...any of them, you know, so...which would be about...definitely I would go, no matter what, if practice was the next day...maybe...I went like 2 times a week. 2 times a week, at the most...maybe one time a week, but...so, multiple times during a month. Maybe 8 or 9 times during a month.

Isaac (21)

Several periods of increased alcohol use were said to be related to his relationships with females.

I also had a girlfriend at that time, so...I would go and drink with her team, and...her team actually drank more than any other team. And you wouldn't expect a women's team to be drunkards like that, but they were drunkards, win, lose or draw, they were having a frigging blowout party. And I never understood that. I'm like, aren't you full of shame and disgrace right now from losing so badly? They're like, "Woooo!" So...I just never understood.

Isaac (21)

I'd go home...and actually, that summer, even though I had a girlfriend, we kind of...I don't know...we weren't talking, and I met another girl who worked at a bar, and then that really started...I drank the whole time I was home, and I was home for another, like, 3 weeks. She worked in the bar, so...I got really good at pool. I was there all day, just... 'Oh, do you want another...' and then she'd come over, "Do you want another beer?" And like, you know, my throat is sore, I'd dehydrated, but I'm like, "Yeah, give me that thing." You know?

Isaac (21)

The combination was made most evident when Isaac described a decrease in drinking once he was not romantically involved with anybody and trying to acquire a new skill related to his sport.

I think my drinking actually went down, because...towards the end of that first semester, or middle of that first semester, me and my...the girlfriend I had that was a...athlete as well, we broke up. And so, as far as like knowing anybody...remember, I only know people on my [athletic] team and know my girlfriend and her friends. So...I didn't drink, like, half as much, because I had, like, 7 teammates at that point in time, and all I cared about was [an aspect of my sport]. I just wanted to get good at that. And my father...no, he didn't lose his job at that point, so...so, yeah. The drinking definitely went down. If I did drink...my junior year...it was...it was, like, because I was bummed out, or something like that...like...a situation I wasn't happy with, because there's no team...you know, it's real hard to meet, like, the kind of girl that I want, or...you know, problems with my ex, because it was a long relationship. So, if I did drink, it was probably, like, you know...like, (groans) let's drink and then I'm just going to fall asleep, like...me and my roommate would drink together.

Isaac (21)

Bruce, in his narrative, spoke repeatedly about not wanting to be an "idiot" when it comes to drinking.

When I came here to college, and I saw...these kids just like...drinking like idiots...it's like, they do stupid stuff. It's like, what are you doing? It's like, why can't you just...enjoy your drink? But, they like drink to get drunk, but...contrary to where...I was...brought up to drink to enjoy, and you know, to socialize.

Bruce (22)

Bruce mentioned his family throughout his narrative, and expressed a desire not to embarrass himself around them.

I know that first time I got really drunk...but it was okay. I was around my family...but after that, like, I was like, okay. I can't do that again, because it's

embarrassing, and...you know, you don't want to be embarrassed in front of your family. So, after that, like...you know, I took a beer, and maybe like...oh, okay...and then maybe another one when I eat.

Bruce (22)

Upon receiving a ticket for underage consumption of alcohol, Bruce blamed both himself and someone else at different points in the narrative.

I don't know if it was the second semester or first. It was just...I was just an idiot. I just had too much to drink...and drank this...called Aristocrat. It was pretty much rubbing alcohol in a bottle.[...]It is so nasty. And, so, we were, like...taking shots of that, and I was fine, and then we went to the party and, like, I had a beer and...that's all I remember...and then, like, I just woke up...and then the friends I went with...they brought me back to the door, but the RA saw me, that I was really intoxicated, so...they decided to call the cops, and...that's how I got in trouble.[...]It was kind of embarrassing, but...I told my mom, and she's like, you should have known better, so...it's worse when your parents aren't mad at you, but they say, I'm disappointed in you

Bruce (22)

I knew I didn't have a problem...drinking. I just messed up one night, and that's what I told my counselor, like...I don't have a drinking problem, I just like messed up. People make mistakes. They drink too much.

Bruce (22)

The first guy that challenged me to drink...I was like, I'm never drinking with you again...and he goes, you messed me up. Like...I was an idiot. I mean, me and him are still cool. We...I see him...he lives near my apartment complex and we still, like...we see each other. Like, it definitely...just because of what happened that night didn't, like...affect our friendship. I mean, he was nice to take me back to the room...instead of just leaving me at the party, so[...]it didn't affect our friendship, anyway.

Bruce (22)

The guy that got me in trouble, he lives in the same complex, but I don't live with him...it's just a different set of friends.

Bruce (22)

Bruce also described having to change his drinking pattern one summer to focus on his school work.

Yeah, it's just like a month, and everything...and like...three months, four months, you put in one month, so it's like...you...I couldn't afford, like, getting drunk and, like, having a hangover and not do homework and stuff.

Bruce (22)

Another informant who delivered a continuous control narrative regarding alcohol use was Bryant. Although he had friends that enjoyed drinking alcohol, he was more interested in using other drugs.

I had friends that really preferred the alcohol, and they would drink, like, every day after school, whereas I got more into the marijuana, because I found with alcohol...now, granted, like, on a Friday or Saturday night, I don't want to smoke weed, because that's an everyday thing...because marijuana, once you've done it a few hundred times, it's just another buzz. You can smoke a joint and go to class...put some Visine in. I could smoke, put some cologne on, and eat dinner with my family...no one is the wiser...even [my father], you know. But, with alcohol, you know, you just become a sloppy mess, so...unless you just don't give a shit, or you have a good 8 hours that...you know, you don't have to be around any parents. Alcohol is just too hard to use like that. You know, especially for kids in school.

Bryant (26)

Bryant took care to frame alcohol as a drug that is more dangerous in aggregate.

I'm not an apologist for any kind of drug. They can all totally fuck you up. But...it's just the crazy thing to me is...I mean, I understand why it is the way it is, but, I mean alcohol...on every level is really the worst, other than instant addiction (snaps). You know, I mean...taking a hit of smokeable cocaine is...I mean, and you can measure...you know, they can measure crystal methamphetamine, how much more potent as far as how much dopamine and, you know, serotonin it releases, sure, the actual rush is not as powerful as alcohol, but if we look at...nobody shoots heroin and then beats their wife. You know, nobody

smokes a joint and then gets into a car accident...I mean, maybe few and far between, of course these other drugs can also impair your motor functions, but...you know, nobody turns into a raving lunatic. I mean, you can give me enough alcohol to where it's not even me anymore. I'm not saying that as an excuse, you know, like...you know, like, I'm not one of these people that, you know, beats on my girlfriend and said, "Oh, hey, I was drunk. It's okay." But, I mean, alcohol, just because of the very nature of it, the way that it works on your body. I mean, it can just make you do so many horrible things...and it's responsible for so many deaths, and not only just...part of that, yes, is because it's so widespread.

Bryant (26)

More than just the physical effect of using other drugs, Bryant enjoyed the identity he believed them to bring.

I had this yearning to really want to fit in, you know...because I was a smart kid, you know...kind of...kind of nerdy, not really...I mean, I was also...I mean, I was always...able to make people laugh, but...you know...and I didn't really get picked on, but I wasn't really popular, you know? And like any kid, you know, I wanted that, and then I realized, you know, I can make people like me by making fun of people or cracking jokes, and then...I guess, the alcohol and drugs just came with that, you know. But, yeah...I had...we...I had a set...a close set of friends, but you know, in high school, there's so many people. I went to a big high school, so...you know, you have friends you hang out with most of the time, and then...and then there's people you just see on the weekends, you know, but...I mean, like I said, I mean...almost everybody drank. I mean, that's like...it's like a given, you know? And...a lot of them smoked weed...I mean...you know? And even less did coke and then, you know, you get into niche things like driving to Baltimore and getting heroin that's few and far between, you know? It's like I wanted to become more and more hardcore. It was like an identity. It's like...I got off on people thinking like, whoa, like, you shoot heroin? Like...like...I don't think...I couldn't...like, you're not my idea of a heroin user, you know? And I got off on, like, people, like, thinking was a certain way, even though I'm not, you know? Just because of their...what their idea of a drug user was.

Bryant (26)

When these other drugs are unavailable for whatever reason, Bryant is open to the idea of drinking alcohol.



There's been periods that...that I drink. Like, I went to Thailand...I've actually been there three times, but this last time, I went...and...I went...I was cold turkey off of methadone, so...needless to say, I got pretty...I withdrew for about a week of two, but...but while I was there, I mean, I drank...and I mean...that's why, to me, alcohol is more of a situational thing, you know. I mean, obviously, to some 60 year old, you know, Russian guy who is pounding vodka when he wakes up, he's not doing it to party, you know? For him, it's just a drug and it's just to get well, but...but for young people, you know, it's...I drank because I was in party central. I was in Phuket, you know? And there's...you know, hookers everywhere, and, you know, muay thai kickboxing and elephants and, you know, all kinds of crazy shit. They had awesome rock bands...with Thai people...cover...covering, you know... So, I just...I partied and partied and partied, and I didn't even think about opiates, you know. I mean...because I was in paradise and I just...I switched to the alcohol. But (snaps), as soon as I came back, you know...I started using opiates again.

Bryant (26)

My personal relationship with alcohol would just be, like...an ex-girlfriend that...that I had an unhealthy relationship with that I still screw every now and then, as a last resort. Yeah. That's how I would personify it. For me, personally. I don't think that...alcohol, in general...for most people, it's not like that. But, yeah, for me...just because of my unique situation, yeah...it's just like an old girlfriend, or an old friend, that...that every once in a while I might fall back on.

Bryant (26)

Bryant recognized that someday he will be unable to drink.

So, if you told someone like him that you could never drink alcohol ever again, he would probably be upset by it. He wouldn't understand it, but it wouldn't ruin his life, you know. For me...I don't really care. I mean, because I know that there's going to come a time that, you know, I'm going to have to deal with this shit and I'm going to have to not ever be able to use any psychoactive substance ever, alcohol or any other thing.

Bryant (26)

Isaac, Bruce, and Bryant each describe in great detail things that they consider more important than drinking. More than just that, though, each makes it a point to label

the substance as inadequate in some way. Isaac did not seem to understand why his girlfriend's team would drink after a bad loss. He also called his more recent drinking behavior to deal with both physical pain and problems with an ex-girlfriend, "So pitiful." Bruce made it clear that he sees much of the behavior people engage in while drinking to be "idiotic." He was usually careful to separate the beverage from the behavior as he spoke.

I think that...every kid at 17...and I know they do it in Europe, from what I hear, where you could go out to a restaurant and, like, under the supervision of your parents, you could have like a wine at the table. I think that...that's really...is good, because you learn how to drink with your family. You don't act a fool...if you act a fool around your family, it's alright...it's your family. They could teach you. So, when I got into college, I wasn't one of those fools that I got outside...pressure here and got super...dumb drunk and done stupid stuff and got myself in trouble. I already had that opportunity before I came to college, so...and I think that's one of the main aspects why...I have a point of view on alcohol, because...the way...I've been brought up, I guess, it's...it was an accepting...like, I know kids who...whose parents, like, hide away from them. It just makes them more curious of what it is...and when you take it away from them, they're going to go out and experiment by themselves. That's when really bad things could happen. I experimented around my family, so...I had the supervision.

Bruce (22)

Even though he spoke of this separation several times throughout the interview, Bruce also acknowledged that the beverage and the behavior cannot be completely divorced. This was most apparent as he spoke about the night he received a ticket for drinking while underage.

I knew I didn't have a problem...drinking. I just messed up one night, and that's what I told my counselor, like...I don't have a drinking problem, I just like

messed up. People make mistakes. They drink too much.

Bruce (22)

Bryant shared his disdain for alcohol and the way mainstream society considers it to be less destructive than the drugs he prefers to focus his attention on.

As far as, you know, the damage alcohol does to society, you know, I can definitely see that, but...I don't believe in throwing people in a box for having a chemical in their pocket, you know. And I think that...you know, what we did during the Prohibition Era is a joke. The way we laugh at that today is the way that we're going to laugh at and look back in disgust, throwing millions of people, non-violent...non-violent drug offenders in prison. That's how it's going to look back on it. I mean, it's going to be like...it's on par with the treatment of the Native Americans. I mean, literally. I mean, that's what we're doing. We're putting people...I'm sorry, I'm going off on a tirade and tangent here, but that's what we're doing. We're putting people in a box for using a chemical, and it not that we just names all chemicals are bad. No, just certain chemicals. You can use tobacco, which is so fucking bad...which I smoke too. I need to quit. And you can use alcohol, but no...these other ones. It's a joke, you know.

Bryant (26)

### **Recaptured Control Narratives**

Unlike those informants who maintained that they were able to put aside alcohol for things more important to them throughout their drinking career, there were some informants who did not come to this realization until later. Jorge described a decline in his grades more than once in college due in large part to drinking. The first time he described this happening was during his first semester of college.

[A friend] lived in...this...this dorm in particular that seemed to be like the party hall. Like, they had the cool RA and, you know, they would sneak beer in and stuff like that, so it was...it was the place to be if you were trying to have a good time, or whatever, and...it reflected in my grades, for sure. I didn't do very well my first semester of college, because I had some early morning classes, and I

would probably be drinking three or four nights a week, you know.[...]I'd say I drank pretty heavily my freshman year of college, just, you know, the freedom of being away from your parents, and like, you know, having to make decisions for yourself of whether to go to class or not to go to class.

Jorge (22)

Jorge described the impact this had on his grades.

After a while...you know, especially after that first semester, I realized that, you know, I'm here to...you know, get an education, not to drink as much as I can, so...I changed my ways and made a much better GPA, like a 3.8 my second semester, so...it was...you know, it took some serious, like...you know, hanging out on that hall less, and you know...maybe not seeing that same group of people as much, because they just didn't have the same common goals as I.

Jorge (22)

Jorge also described a similar decline in grades due in part to drinking during the first semester of his junior year, his first in a fraternity.

When I first got into the fraternity, it was pretty much...drink until you can't drink anymore. Like, you know, it was...you know, I definitely made a fool of myself a couple of times off of, like, you know, whether it was drinking liquor and just like getting out of hand, or, you know...whatever...puking because of drinking. It was...I think I got more drunk as I got into the fraternity, but I drank less, if that makes sense. Like, I would...I would go harder, as they say...or...as I say, you know...drink...drink more than...than maybe...I mean, because it gets to the point with drinking where you can...you can just keep...you can be drinking and not even know you're drinking...like, you know...you're that...distorted in, like, what you're doing, that you're not even thinking about it.

Jorge (22)

[My drinking] was back to three or four nights a week, just like freshman year...and it reflected in my GPA. I made another crappy GPA in my first year in the fraternity, which, you know, the fraternity is supposed to be...you know, an aid to your...your academics. You know, having those...those guys that can tell you what classes to take with what teachers is really helpful, but...like, when...when you choose to...to drink instead of go to class, and like, you know,

stuff like that, then...or drink and then have to either go to class hungover, where you're not really as engaged in the class, or just not go at all. So...you know, I really think drinking had a...it has a direct effect on everything else you do. You know, it's kind of...but...but it also depends on, like, you know, how you manage it. Like, if...if you can drink, and you know, know when to cut yourself off, which most people don't, I feel like, and like...know...I guess, how you get when you're drunk. You know, you don't want to...you don't want to be that guy that...that embarrasses yourself or embarrasses your fraternity.

Jorge (22)

Jorge described a more permanent adjustment with regard to control following this second decline in grades.

I didn't hang around the new house as much, so I didn't really get, like, you know...if you live in the house, it is a 24 hour party in my opinion, you know. If you're not partying, then you know, somebody, like, you know, your roommate is and is going to keep you up all night. It is...it's definitely not for the faint of heart to live in a fraternity house or a house where people...that...that do drink regularly, so...like...having one or two guys that weren't...in school, I think, made a difference. You know, they were kind of...they would either work their afternoon or evening job or whatever, and then just, you know, drink the night away, kind of. So...I think my...once again, that...I guess my senior year, I made...I made good grades that semester, so I feel like I must have done a pretty good job of managing...as far as like when I drank, it probably was only at, like, you know...our social events or parties, and like...wasn't doing like...a nightly drinking thing like I was with some of the older guys in the fraternity. It was more...me and the guys that I came in with had this goal of, like, you know, building a bigger fraternity...or better fraternity.

Jorge (22)

While describing his first year of college in South America, Walter also described drinking as a major distraction.

Huge mistake, cause I didn't...I mean, I wasn't a good student then, what was I going to do in [that South American country] without my parents, you know? Easily, you know, I was...18 at the time. I can drink there legally, so...yeah. So then there was a significant increase, because every night, I would party.

Wouldn't go to class, but...yeah.[...]People tended to have their stuff on...their crap together, you know. They would study; I wouldn't. I'd be out every night, so...I'm also someone who just goes out, and like I meet new people, and I enjoy doing that, so...even if I was by myself, I'll go out and just meet people at the bar and hang out with them, and...I'm a social...sort of...social butterfly. So, yeah, it increased significantly at that point. So much that I ended up failing out.

Walter (27)

Failing out of college after one year inspired Walter to redirect his main focus from socializing and drinking to his education. Because his parents were unwilling to pay for his education any further, he began working and taking college classes to return to a degree program. The first college he attended in the United States did not have a social and physical environment that fostered much drinking.

It was a tough year. It was...just not a lot to do there. You know, I had some friends, but...it was very, very southern, you know, so I guess, their partying ended up being this...again, this field party idea. No bars, so just house parties. This may sound bad, but it was a pretty grimy spot, you know, as far as just like drugs, and...just...yeah, pretty...pretty grimy, all around. I'd go out. You know, I made some friends; I'd go out, but it wasn't really my scene. I don't know, this whole...southerners, I guess, are...you know...tended to stick together, you know what I mean, and I wasn't always...really welcome in a lot of the social circles, you can say. So, I had my group of friends; we'd hang out...the drinking was casual, but...yeah...there's really not a ton to do, so you really couldn't find yourself doing a lot.

Walter (27)

After one year at this second school, Walter took a job in the Southeastern United States doing construction. He rose to a managerial position, but was still determined to earn a college degree.

[I had] about 80 men under me, twice my age. You know, it...it was pretty intimidating, but it was great. I loved it and I loved the challenge, and building

things, and...I feel that it was a success in the fact that, you know, I was so young and able to...become so...productive, so...yeah. So, at that point, I think that I would say that, with that...I mean, construction hours are pretty tough, because you have to get up really early to get everything ready, and then, you know, at night, you just want to pass out. And then I started going to school at night, so...going back to the drinking, yeah, it was really...during the week, I wouldn't. Friday, Saturday nights, I would go out with friends, have a few drinks. But again, because of my hours, I was just always so tired that I didn't really go out too late. So, I cut back significantly.

Walter (27)

Following a transfer back to the city in which he attended high school in the Southeastern United States, Walter decided to leave his job and attend school full-time again. He described this causing him to cut back his alcohol consumption even further.

The time came that I decided to go back to school full-time. So I quit that job, and...actually, I had done...doing the night classes, as I mentioned. At that point, I was a full-time student and a full-time employee. And then...let me think...and then I went full time at [a community college]. And I met people there, but just this mix of people...older students, younger students, you know. At that point, I was...what...24? So I...you know, I was really just strictly business, like I want to go, take my classes, go home. What was I doing for work at that time...oh, another restaurant in [my new city]. Yeah. You tend to make the most amount of money in the least amount of hours working in restaurants, so yeah...went and worked at a restaurant in [my new city]. But again, it was a different...I had a different mentality. My mentality was hey, let's go to school, let's finish, so we can, you know, move on. I was a little older at the time, and after, you know, my schedule shifted, you know, I'd go out Friday and Saturday nights, but it was a different sort of...it was very casual drinking with friends.

Walter (27)

While describing his decrease in planned intoxication, Walter described a general shift in his priorities.

Yeah, I guess [planning for intoxication less] comes with it, because it...it loses its...you know, when you're younger, I think, there's this idea that you're just

going to go, and...you know...people, people in general, there's this idea of...just like, yeah, let's just go get fucked up tonight, you know? And plan out your night to where it revolves around knowing that you're going to get fucked up. And it loses its appeal, and you realize that I don't get anything accomplished, you know? I'm...I don't wake up until late, I don't get anything done, and as more responsibility comes on, you realize that it's really tough to...for these two things to...coexist, no? That's why Fridays and Saturdays are cool, you know? Because unless you have something going on that day, you can always push it back until later, but if you have work or early class, and you actually care about work and early class...at one point, I didn't. Then it becomes...I wouldn't say important, because I don't know that it was important, but it loses its...you realize where...where it just doesn't fit into your life, if you look...or want to be productive. Some people can do it. Some people can drink every night and wake up the next morning at 7am and be at work and be themselves, be productive. I've got an uncle who is a... who is a surgeon. The guy can drink like a fish, wake up the next morning, and be one of the most brilliant men I know. I know that I can't do that. I'll be in bed until noon. So...I...you realize your limits. You realize, like, if I look to really want to do this...so it came with that maturity that I got in the workplace. Like, I want to be at work early in the morning and I want to be productive. I don't want to just sit there and like...do nothing, you know? So...in my case, as responsibility grew, I had to make the adjustments to...drink less and less often.

Walter (27)

Hunter was drinking with people in his neighborhood “pretty much about every day” at the age of 17.

I used to drink a lot. I mean, I used to go out every day to...I mean, even if we went to lunch, you know, we'd go to a restaurant or a sports bar and I'd have, you know, a couple of drinks with lunch, you know...and then...we might sit there for another hour and have some more drinks, and then we'd leave and go do whatever. Then dinner time would come around and we'd go out for dinner and be drinking at dinner, and now it's night time, so we'd just...take it from there to going out to another bar and then to a club, and so it was just kind of consistent. It was more of a...it was like an all-day thing, really. I mean, you know, it wasn't nothing abnormal or anything seen as abnormal at that time with that group of people to be drinking, you know...I mean, we'd start drinking at 1 o'clock in the afternoon. I mean, that wasn't...you know...un-normal. It was...it was just something that happened.

Hunter (26)



For several semesters during this period, Hunter took classes at a local community college, but admitted he was not focused on his studies.

I started [community college] in, like '04, so shit, I don't even know how old I was, but I didn't go to school...like, I had dropped a bunch of classes, failed out because I wouldn't go...stuff like that...because I was more concerned with hanging out with my friends and getting drunk and stuff like that.

Hunter (26)

At 24, Hunter stopped taking community college classes and increased his drinking even more.

[The previous drinking pattern] probably lasted until I was probably twenty...probably 24. And then, after that, I...I kind of started to drink more than I did then, because I wasn't really involved in anything as far as like productivity...as far as like school or...or really anything going on, you know, so...it was...I guess an idle time, you know, just creates problems...and kind of gets you in trouble.

Hunter (26)

Hunter described having an epiphany of sorts during this period and redoubling his efforts to earn a college degree.

I just kind of became more...more focused. And I found what I wanted to do, and it was something that I wanted to do as opposed to like...I didn't really just see it as a job. I saw it more as like something that I would actually enjoy doing, so it took it seriously.[...]I call myself an inactive gang member...not active. I don't participate in any type of gang activity, but...I found out, you know, there's a lot of avenues that people can take as far as trying to help people...and I just thought it was good for personal experience to...you know, kind of try to travel down that avenue. My goal is to...work with nothing but youth gang members. Because I personally believe that you cannot...you can't really change a situation or influence a situation as much as somebody can who has been there. You know, it's just like here at school, with...you know...you want...advice about a theory class, you would go to, you know, our theory professor. You wouldn't go to...a

geology professor; do you know what I mean? So...I think that it's a lot easier for...and I can speak from personal experience...like, I didn't want to listen to any of my teachers or anybody who was trying to tell me to do something different, because in my eyes, you haven't been there and done that, so you can't truly relate. But if you have somebody who has been there-done that, and has actually changed themselves for the better, then you kind of believe that it's possible.

Hunter (26)

Like the three people mentioned in this section so far, Jay described a substantial increase in drinking during his first semester of college.

First semester, [my drinking] intensified...most definitely. I was having fun, just meeting new people and it was just...it's what everybody was doing, and, you know...I'm trying to think of how I was really shy. I mean, I always like to say that's what helped me come out, but I never really was shy. It did...you know, it makes you more social, so it's always easier, especially if everybody else is doing it, then you join in, and...yeah, it was...it was just...definitely, for the first semester, it was...it intensified. I...I recall even a couple of bad weeks when, you know, I used to drink like 5 days out of the week, but, you know, you can only do that for so long...well, some people can do it for a lifetime. I can only for...you know, for that...one semester, and...and...you know, just partying a lot, drinking a lot. At some point, I decided that it would be cheaper to buy everclear, cause...yeah...that was...and you can buy one bottle and don't need that much of it, right?

Jay (22)

Also like Jorge, Walter, and Hunter, Jay then described a narrative turn away from alcohol and toward school.

After that semester, I wasn't really into it anymore. I...I started...everything started to seem so superficial. It's, like...just the whole...college thing. Not even just like the partying and drinking. It's like...most students that I came in touch with and everything seemed so...superficial, and, you know, like, people...people just started to seem stupid and immature, and...and...just like, you know, they had no plan, or had no idea what they were doing, they were just...and to me, like I had come here for more than that, and...then...yeah, so... It just didn't make sense to me. It stopped making sense, basically, it what it was. I saw...I saw its

purpose...it was, you know, people were doing it socializing...I was still keeping up with my work. It was easy. But then, you know, I thought it was just something that, you know, you had...I guess something that I had to get over with...over with, and then, you know, focus in on whatever I wanted to do, which was actual learning.

Jay (22)

Throughout Isaac's continuous control narrative, he described romantic pursuits as being one of the factors that led him to drink. In Jay's recaptured control narrative, he described these pursuits as being a focus that supersedes alcohol use rather than one that includes it.

I was dating someone; I started dating second semester, or after Spring Break freshman year, and we dated through the summer, and we broke up, like, a couple days before Christmas, so...yeah. It wasn't much drinking or going on and socializing.[...]There's something about girlfriends. They just don't let you drink.

Jay (22)

Jay then described an increase in drinking in order to repair the social bonds he broke while dating this woman.

Well, I started hanging out with...with my friends again. I started, you know, making friends and...so, it was occasionally a...but not...not...I wouldn't really drink to the...you know...to that point where...to be drunk. I would...I used to drink because I was just trying to make friends after, you know, the last girl I dated completely destroyed my social life. So, I was just trying to make friends, and...my best friend, he had made a group of friends, and I sort of started hanging out with them. That was definitely more of, you know, occasional. We would do other things; we would play sports, you know.

Jay (22)

Following this and further focusing on school and volunteer work, Jay described his focus shifting to another romantic partner.

The girl I'm dating right now...I'm still dating her...I guess...you know...it's...this is how it works. I'm wiped out. So, I...get out of class, I go to work, get out of meetings, and then...you know...I'm home. I want to watch a movie. I want to go to sleep. Okay...I'll go to sleep...and that's how it works. A lot, well every night...it at least becomes the trend. You know, you get out of class, and, you know, spend the night together, so I either go to her house or she comes to mine, and...and we stay in, you know, either do homework, or watch Friends. That's the only show that I watch on television. It's kind of funny, because you fall asleep watching Nick at Nite and then you wake up, it's cartoons, if I leave the TV on. It's the most disturbing thing. But...but, yeah, that's pretty much...that's how a lot of nights and weekends, and, you know, sometimes we go out together. You know, we make sure that...because, it's easy, you know, to get comfortable with someone and sort of forget about your friends and stuff, but that's not necessarily healthy, so, you know, we make sure we go out. Her...her friends...she's another sorority girl...but she's not really...she is in the same sorority of the girl that I used to date before, so there's kind of not a lot of good relationships, so...we don't really hang out with her friends. But, you know, she hangs out with my friends, and...we go out sometimes, anyway...go to bars, or have get-togethers, or have a couple of drinks, but...I'm usually, you know, driving, so I don't...I don't really drink that much either.

Jay (22)

For a slightly different sort of recaptured control narrative, we turn to Grant.

Rather than a pattern of heavy alcohol use, Grant described a comparatively minor tryst with the substance as far as quantity is concerned, but one that was no less meaningful to him.

I never drank to the point where...I blacked out. I've never blacked out. I've never drunk so much to the point where I had no idea what was going on. I would say that the most I ever drank was to the point where I was tipsy and had a sense of what I was doing, and then next day...it was like the worst day of my life. Like, basically the toilet was my best friend, so...so that was my one experience to the point where, like, I would say I got a hangover the next day.[...]It was...4 years ago...my freshman year, spring semester around this time.

Grant (22)

Rather than refocusing his attention on school like the others mentioned, Grant describes how this experience led him to focus on religion.

During the time when I...drunk to the point where I got tipsy, it was like during a time where me and my girlfriend at the time, you know, we weren't doing too hot, and...yeah, I just needed to just...experience...what it looks like to get tipsy and stuff like that. So, then I decided to do it, and...you know...we ended up breaking up, and...I think I turned away from alcohol because I didn't want to go back to having a hangover...to feeling so crappy...to feeling, like...I have to vomit, but nothing is coming out. I mean, that was probably just the worst feeling that I've ever had...just because, like...I just couldn't do anything, you know? I was just stuck, you know, in the bathroom, you know, constantly trying to throw up, but I couldn't do anything. And I just don't ever want to go back to that state. You know, when I see people struggle with alcohol, you know, being...experience a lot of different negative...actually being put in negative situations, like rape or having money stolen[...]or just in a situation that they didn't...they don't want to be in. Like, I don't ever want to go down that path. And so, that's when I realized (snaps), like, I just don't want to be in this...but then...and then, through that, it's kind of like (taps table)...really sealed, just, my faith...in God.

Grant (22)

I just didn't want to feel like crap. I mean, alcohol doesn't really bring any positive...it doesn't affect your body positively. It only deteriorates it, slowly but surely. And I would say...that...I mean, definitely my relationship with God has definitely...opened my eyes to alcohol and really has shown me that I don't need alcohol to be cool, to be accepted, to be satisfied, to be comforted...just because when people get drunk, they are in a different world, you know? They're just in their own world. They're not in reality, I would say, just because mentally, they're not capable to do the things that they could do sober.

Grant (22)

Although Grant does not describe school as his newfound focus, he does indicate how this experience has helped him plan for his post-collegiate future.

There's just been a lot of things that...have influenced me. I mean, that's why I want to be a...counselor working with alcoholics, just because I think that...a lot of people are...controlled by the alcohol substance. You know, they need it

to...be able to...function. They need it to be able to...you know, spit game with the opposite sex. You know, they need it to...be the life of the party, which you could always be the life of the party on your own. It's just that they buy into this culture that they've kind of been brought up with, where it's because of entertainment, movies, friends, family, or anything like that. I mean, there's a lot of factors that trickle in...that kind of influence people to kind of like still hold onto that concept of why they drink.

Grant (22)

Each of the five continuous control narratives above doesn't just describe a decrease in drinking, but also an increased focus in another area. Only Grant did not describe one of these new focuses as being school, but he also never identified his school work as suffering due to his involvement with alcohol. However Grant, as did the others, fit his described decrease in alcohol as part of an increased focus on his post-collegiate life.

As mentioned above, several of those who constructed a continuous control narrative were careful to relegate alcohol as a distraction from their other pursuits. Many of the people who told a recaptured control narrative, however, described their alcohol use as either inevitable or at least as an important step in identity exploration.

A lot of my friends like to...go out to the course and, like, split a case or something, and like...just like, enjoy the time, as to where I'm more to the point with golf where I'm serious about it, and feel like alcohol gets in my way of doing my best, so...I guess it's just having...having that perspective of what alcohol can do, you know...being...I feel like being 22 is...like, you know, ages older than being 21, because when you're 21, you're...you're kind of still figuring out, like, you know, where to go to drink, as far as like, publically, like, you know...socially acceptable drinking...bars, clubs, whatever. You figure that stuff out when you're 22, and when you're 22, you pretty much...you know what you like and if you want to go to, you know, wherever and have that good time that you always have, then you...then you know that's there for you. But you're not,

like...I think you're less likely to, like, explore, you know...just...there's not as much unknown.

Jorge (22)

Jay also identifies his history with alcohol as playing an important role in his maturation process.

Oh, yeah. It's something you have to get out of your system, just because...I feel, like, as soon as I started getting involved, I feel like that entire semester was a waste, because I kind of...you know, kind of pushed myself harder...pushed me harder to...to, you know, make up for it, so...in that aspect, I guess, it did shape my college career, and, you know, the way I go about things. You know, for...for a variety of reasons, I feel like, you know, like I always have to be doing something, like...productive, and I feel like that was not a productive semester, so...I mean, I look at that, and, you know, that's definitely...I wish I could take that back, and I probably wouldn't have gone about it the same way that I did, just because...I would have [done] so much more if...you know, had I not spent most of my time drinking, or, you know, recovering.

Jay (22)

## **Summary**

The idea of an interaction or event is contextually bounded and relatively static. The notion of a relationship, on the other hand, contains a dynamic character that develops over time and across contexts. This chapter explored the development of the relationships described with regard to the level of agency each informant assigned to alcohol and the amount of personal control that each described having at different points.

Each of the narratives constructed in this project concluded with the informant contending that he was in complete control of his alcohol use. Some made the claim that they maintained the upper hand throughout their relationship with alcohol, while others described a period when alcohol maintained a level of control over the individual. These

people went on to discuss the changes and decisions that led to their new perspective on alcohol.



## CHAPTER IX

### CONCLUSION

Each person invested agency in alcohol at some point in our discussion. Alcohol was described as a change agent, altering either the drinker or the situation in some manner during its use. It can end up controlling a situation or shaping an outcome in ways that human interaction alone could not achieve. The above pages take a look at the different configurations of this relationship that were created during the interview situation.

The first step of any relationship is an introduction. While it is not realistic to ask informants how they first became aware of alcohol, informants were asked to provide a general sense of alcohol use and discussion in their home growing up. Much of the resulting discussion involved early alcohol use that took place within the familial context. These lessons, either experiential or not, took place along one of two general fronts. Some informants recalled being introduced to alcohol as more acceptable in their culture of origin than that in the United States. Others described familial socialization as primarily taking place around the idea of moderation and the notion that it results in fewer negative consequences than drinking large amounts. Regardless of the specific socialization frame discussed, informants described their family introducing alcohol in a certain way and, in the process, creating a straw man of sorts to contrast family-endorsed drinking.

Whatever the specific lesson learned, informants framed their early introduction to alcohol as one of common sense grounded in moderation and/or culture. Investigation continued with a look at the trajectories informants created as they continued to describe their experience drinking alcohol. As they described alcohol use across time, informants frequently linked discussion to at least one other component they consider to be important in their life stories.

The next section focused on the words informants used to make sense of these relationships. First, we looked at the vernaculars used to create categories of intent. These categories give us a good idea of what people seek to get out of their relationships with alcohol. Following that, we turned our attention to the vocabularies used to create different types of drinking. These categorizations loosely describe interactions people experience with alcohol, or at least the understandings the informants created at the time of the interview. Informants choose from one of these categories to satisfy the intent they bring to the drinking occasion. Despite strategies employed in an attempt to control interactions with alcohol, the selected type of drinking does not always satisfy the desired intent. Alcohol is a volatile substance and may change one of many things in a drinking occasion. Informants reported instances of struggle to maintain control within different interactions.

Some informants also report vying for control over alcohol in descriptions of their drinking career as a whole. Some people constructed continuous control narratives, histories that focused on maintaining control over the substance throughout the drinking career. Other informants told of periods where alcohol made their goals difficult to

identify and/or pursue. Informants employing this second type of narrative, known here as a recaptured control narrative, told of motivations to free themselves from the agency of alcohol and described a redirection of focus.

The agency attributed to alcohol influences both alcohol use and behavior pursued while drinking. The present study uses the words of informants to flesh out this idea of alcohol as having control over the individual in different situations as well as in different points in one's life history. Relatively little study has been done regarding the attribution of power to a nonhuman subject and none up to this point involves alcohol. The unique infusion of culture in this projection goes hand in hand with the acceptance of the traits assigned as being considered common sense. Much of the strategy behind drinking was attached through language use to expectation, reason, and practicality.

The use of language to understand thoughts about drinking has not been thoroughly examined in the sociology of alcohol use. The present investigation, as a pilot study, demonstrates the potential of this type of inquiry. Drinkers frequently disavow behavior committed under the influence of alcohol as representative of the alcohol and not the true self. By better understanding the assignment of power that is believed to be behind this, researchers, as well as public health practitioners and policy makers, may be able to understand the drinking behind alcohol-related consequences in a manner that will lead to more insightful policies or interventions. As we begin to understand what is considered to be common sense about drinking, and consequently where the decisions are seen to actually lie, we may be able to call more attention to the definitions and beliefs behind the relationships rather than just the focus on decision making.

## **Limitations**

This pilot study has several substantial limitations and results should be interpreted cautiously. The sample size of ten is quite small and leaves many perspectives unexplored. All of the informants were recruited from upper-level sociology courses, resulting in a sample unrepresentative of the college student population. As the vocabulary of sociology is a part of the informants' speech, several used it to describe their relationship. This way of speaking and thinking is not common across the college population.

Each interview took place on a college campus, and just as the setting is important in dictating drinking behavior, the incongruity of this educational setting may have affected the authenticity of the responses. Construction in these interview settings is likely to be different from the constructions made in contexts informants associate with alcohol use.

## **Future Studies**

Additional research could do a great deal to further the understanding of the relationship people develop with alcohol. Investigation involving additional informants with diverse experiences would shed further light on the construction of these narratives and the relationships they create. The inclusion of females, non-students, people of different age ranges, and lifelong residents of other geographic areas would each add valuable information and create a rich description of these relationships and the impact they have on alcohol use and related behavior.

Studies of this sort with people who have different drinking patterns at the time of the interview could also add value to this discussion. The inclusion of people who identify as alcoholics, either recovered or not, would add a new component to the relationships created, as would discussions with those who do not self-identify as having a drinking problem, but still paint a picture of their drinking at the time of the interview as being out of control.

These two types of narratives discussed above, continuous control narratives and recaptured control narratives, only describe two points on the continuum of control that is suggested here. Narratives that tell of multiple oscillations between control and loss of control would also prove valuable to this research. The relationships described by this group would certainly add information about the struggle for control many face. An archetype on one end of the continuum would be one who describes a loss of control over his drinking. Consequently, it would also prove interesting to include information about the relationships developed by people who have never consumed alcohol for reasons both personal and cultural. This project is just the beginning of what could prove to be a valuable strategy to consider alcohol use and the decisions involved in it.

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## APPENDIX A

### IN-PERSON RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Hi, my name is Adrian Good, and I am a master's student here in the Sociology Department at UNCG.

I am currently working on a master's thesis concerning alcohol use and am looking for participants willing to volunteer about an hour of time to speak with me about their perspective and experiences. Participation and answers will be kept strictly confidential and you will have the opportunity to skip any question or walk away at any time. There will be absolutely no penalty for either.

I am currently looking for male participants who are either between 21 and 22 or 26 and 30. Aside from these age restrictions, the only requirement for participation is the use of alcohol at some point in the past and/or present. The amount or regularity of use does not matter.

If you are interested in receiving more information about possible participation in this study, please let me know on the sheet going around the room. If you'd rather contact me yourself, my email address is [abgood@uncg.edu](mailto:abgood@uncg.edu) (on board). I will gladly send an email to anyone interested. Deciding not to participate at this point or any other will not affect your grade in this class in any way.

I would be glad to answer any questions you have or provide any additional information. Thank you for your time.

## APPENDIX B

### EMAIL RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Hi,

My name is Adrian Good, and I am a graduate student in the Sociology Department here at UNCG.

I'm currently working on a master's thesis concerning alcohol use and am looking for participants willing to volunteer no more than an hour of time to speak with me about their perspectives and experiences with the substance.

INSTRUCTOR NAME was kind enough to forward this message to HIS/HER students for me. Participation will have absolutely no effect on your grade in this course. Answers will be kept strictly confidential, and those who agree will have the opportunity to skip any question or walk away at any time. There will be no penalty for either.

I'm currently looking for male participants either between 21-22 or 26-30. Aside from these gender and age restrictions, the only other requirement for participation is the use of alcohol at some point in time.

If you are interested in participating in this study or have any questions, please send me an e-mail at <[abgood@uncg.edu](mailto:abgood@uncg.edu)>.

Thank you for reading and considering this request.

Adrian

## APPENDIX C

### CONSENT FORM

#### UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

#### CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT: LONG FORM

Project Title: ***Investigating Relationships with Alcohol***

Project Director: ***Steve Kroll-Smith***

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

##### **What is the study about?**

This is a research project. In this study I will seek to understand some of the ways college students make sense of their varied relationships to spirits. In the process, I will describe and discuss some of the ways the presence and/or use of alcohol affect how my informants define various situations that they find themselves in.

##### **Why are you asking me?**

All informants must be male and have used alcohol at some point in time. To ensure diversity of experience, some informants will be 21 or 22 years of age while the remaining ones will be between 26 and 29 years old at the time of the interview. There are no additional requirements or limitations that affect participation.

##### **What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?**

Participation in this study involves engaging in an interview with a variable length that is not to exceed 60 minutes. Questions will center on alcohol use and the conditions through which alcohol use occurs in and personal limitations are established. Questions have the potential to prompt feelings of regret, embarrassment, and shame in certain informants. Informants are free to decline to answer any question and stop the interview at any time.

##### **Are there any audio/video recording?**

Interviews will be recorded on audio and transcribed prior to analysis. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, your confidentiality for things you say on the tape cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the tape as described below. Audio recordings will be destroyed shortly after the thesis has been approved by the Sociology Department and UNCG Graduate School. Transcripts will lack all identifying information and will be kept for three years after completion of the study.

**What are the dangers to me?**

The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. If there is a breach of confidentiality, informants may receive criticism from others and/or experience feelings of embarrassment. Precautions, described below, will be taken to minimize the chances of such a breach.

If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated or if you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Eric Allen in the Office of Research Compliance at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351. Questions, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study can be answered by Professor Steve Kroll-Smith who may be contacted at <s\_krolls@uncg.edu>.

**Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?**

Of interest is how people describe different drinking occasions and the meanings they associate with them. Through analysis of these interpretations, research may assist in an improved understanding of the parameters people create and use as they engage in and react to alcohol use. Such an understanding will potentially assist in the identification of social conditions that lead to decisions made by the drinker and other people.

**Are there any benefits to *me* for taking part in this research study?**

There are no direct benefits to participants in this study.

**Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?**

There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

**How will you keep my information confidential?**

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. Names of the participants will not be recorded or used in the research in any way. The participants' names will also not be connected to aliases used in any way. Aliases will be selected at random from the #101-250 most popular male baby names in the year 1990, as listed by the Social Security Administration at <http://www.ssa.gov/oact/babynames/>. Names that match any of the participants will be removed prior to selection. Other than only using the male list of names, there will be no effort to match aliases with individuals.

When not being analyzed, this audio recorder that contains interview recordings will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office along with all other data on the third floor of the Frank Porter Graham building on the campus of UNCG. Consent forms will also be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Consent forms and interview transcripts will be destroyed three years after study completion.



**What if I want to leave the study?**

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state.

**What about new information/changes in the study?**

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

**Voluntary Consent by Participant:**

By signing this consent form you are agreeing that you have read it, or that it has been read to you and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing to consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate, or have the individual specified above as a participant participate, in this study described to you by Adrian Good.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

#### OPENING COMMENT TO INFORMANT

- Please do not use your name or the names of others during the interview. I want to make sure that this information cannot be linked to specific people.

#### INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS: ORIENTATION TO ALCOHOL

- Tell me about your first experience drinking alcohol.
- Without identifying any specific family member, please give me a sense of alcohol use in the home of your childhood. How would you categorize this?
- Do you recall any discussion among family members about alcohol? If yes, what were conversations like? How much of this discussion were you involved in?
- Now, have you ever drunk so much that you would say, “I got drunk last night” or something like that?
  - If Yes,
    - Do you mind telling me a little about your first experience with drinking to the point of intoxication?
    - Please ask to “unpack” the term used to describe intoxication. What does this mean to you? Why do you use this word to describe your experience? How did you come to this definition?
  - **Probe:** Ask if there are any other experiences with intoxication he would like to share.
- How would you rank yourself as a drinker? Would you say you “drink occasionally,” “drink moderately,” or “drink often?”
  - **Probe:** Get him to describe what he means by labeling himself an occasional, moderate or often drinker. Is there a difference between settings and/or groups of people?

## THE DRINKING CAREER

- Tell me about the first group of people you had regular interactions with that involved alcohol in some way, shape, or form. You don't have to have been drinking it, I'm asking for information about a group where alcohol was regularly present.
  - What did you do in this group?
  - How did you feel about these actions at the time?
  - How did other group members feel about them?
  - Can you remember any of the words you used to discuss drinking and drunkenness with members of each group?
- How would you characterize your involvement in this collection of people?
  - What did you bring to the group?
  - How would you describe the group as a whole?
  - Please describe your relationship with these group members. Were you close to any, some, most, or all? How frequently was alcohol present in group gatherings?
- Please tell me about any other groups around this same time.
  - Were encounters with alcohol similar?
  - How did the groups differ otherwise?
  - How would these group members feel about your behavior in the other groups?
  - Did you ever have to explain behavior in one group to those in another? How did you do this?
  - How did your approach to alcohol vary in these different groups?
- Tell me about these groups up to the present day. (While doing this, I will construct a timeline on a piece of paper identifying each distinct group and group changes as best can. Groups will be identified by the description given of the group as a whole.)
  - Was the transition across time from one phase to another a conscious choice, or did it just sort of evolve?
  - Did anything else change at around the same time? Were these choices or did they evolve as well? Did your drinking mates also make changes of one sort or another?
- Across this timeline, were there any periods where you would regularly drink alone?
  - What was different about this period?

## CURRENT BEHAVIOR

- Tell me about your most recent experience drinking alcohol.
- Tell me about the most recent time you \_\_\_\_\_ (repeat language informant used to describe intoxication – e.g. “got drunk,” “got hammered,” etc.)

## CURRENT BEHAVIOR: DAYS OF THE WEEK

Sticking with the present, let’s go through a usual week for you day by day, from Monday through Sunday.

### MONDAY, ETC.:

- Are you likely to drink on Monday?
  - “No” Could you imagine an occasion that might prompt you to drink on Monday
  - “Yes” (If so, see below line)

I’d like to know how you would describe a typical Monday when you might drink. Who are you with, if anyone? What’s going on? Where are you likely to be? Etc.

### LOOKING FOR:

- How do you decide if you will drink on a Monday or not?
- What initiates a Monday drinking occasion and what happens in the planning stages?

## DRINKING FREQUENCY AND PATTERN

### PATTERNS IN TIME, LOCATION, OTHERS PRESENT

#### WEEK

- How many times do you normally drink in one week?
- How does this vary? What happens in the weeks this number goes up or down?

#### YEAR

- Are there periods of the year when you drink more or less frequently than usual? What do you think leads to these unusual periods?
- Are the expectations different at different times of the year? What are the changes that you think lead to these different expectations?

## THE EXPERIENCE OF DRINKING OCCASIONS

- Please walk me through a drinking session. How does drinking commence, escalate, and eventually stop?
  - Please describe the series of events in a typical drinking experience.
  - How much are you likely to drink at one time? In one day?
  - How do you decide it is time to stop drinking?
- How do you know when you are intoxicated?
- Who is generally there?
  - How would you describe your relationship with these people?
  - Where else do you see them?
  - When and how does alcohol make an appearance?
- What do these particular occasions mean to you?
- How important is the use or presence of alcohol to this meaning?

## MANAGEMENT OF SELF IN DRINKING OCCASIONS

- How often do you have, say, six or more drinks in one day?
- To what extent do you anticipate intoxication and prepare for it?
  - What do you expect to happen?
  - Are there any benefits or negative consequences you either seek or avoid?
  - How do you think about or plan how you will manage the situation?
  - What motivates these preparations?
- How do you imagine a drinking experience will turn out?
  - How does this vary based on others present?
  - Is this what usually happens?
  - Please describe a time when what you expected to happen and what actually happened did not match up.
- There's this funny phrase I hear from time to time, "a do-over," like when someone does something and they wish they had a second chance to do it differently. Have you heard of that term? Have you ever been drinking and had one of those times that you would like to do-over?
- Do you think others you drink with have things they wish they do over?

## DRINKING ANTICIPATIONS

- Can you put into words what alcohol does to you or for you?
  - If you had to respond to the question "Why do you drink at all?" what might you say?
  - What are you looking for?
- What, for you, is the best part about drinking alcohol? Is there a worst part?

- How do you think the same situation differs in the presence and/or use of alcohol as compared to the absence of the substance?
  - Is your frame of mind different?
- Please describe a time when what you expected to happen and what actually happened did not match up.

#### CLOSING QUESTIONS: RELATIONSHIPS WITH ALCOHOL

- Now in closing, I'd like to know a little about you might describe your relationship with alcohol. Would say, for example, that alcohol is a friend of yours, an enemy maybe? How about a confidant? An intimate?
- Now, what does that mean when you say that alcohol is a(n) \_\_\_\_\_?
- Can you think of an adjective that describes this relationship a little further?
- Can you do this for the other distinct phases you mentioned? Indicate individual relationships at the top of the timeline. How would you say this relationship has evolved?
- Thinking about you as an individual, how did the meaning you assigned to alcohol, or the intent with which you consumed it, change?
- Please describe the role of alcohol in your life. Looking across time, how has it helped make you who you are?